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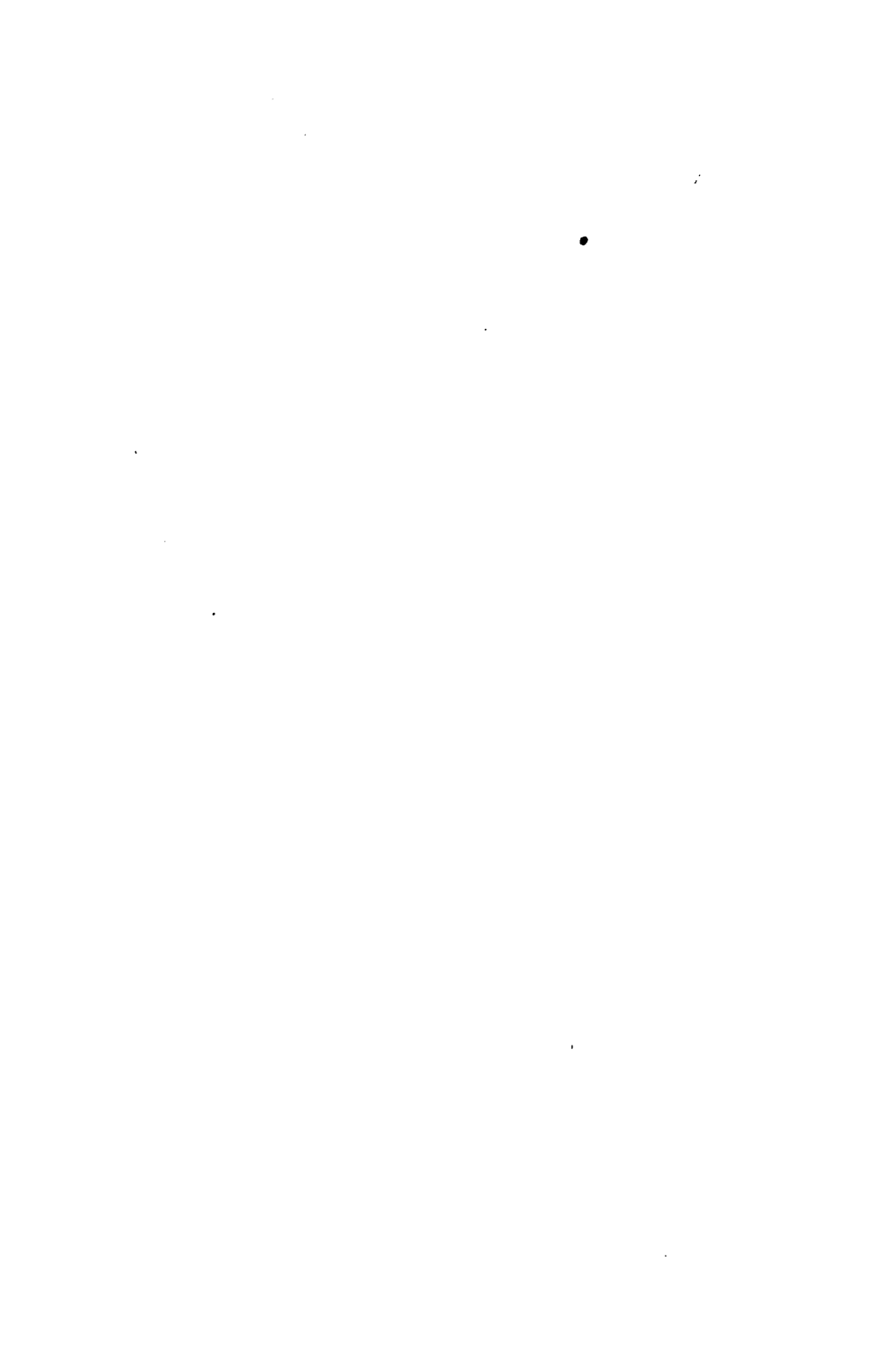
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# A BOOK OF ESSAYS



## NOTE

THESE essays have been printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *Cornhill*, *The National Review*, *The Monthly Review*, and (a journal I hope I did not help to kill) *The Londoner*. I am aware that some critics object to one's making a volume of such things. But it is surely severe on a poor writer that he should be denied a judgment, such as it may be, on his work as a whole. In any case I have good precedents.

6

# A BOOK OF ESSAYS

BY G. S. STREET

AUTHOR OF

'THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BOY'

'THE WISE AND THE WAYWARD'

'THE TRIALS OF THE BANTOCKS'

'A BOOK OF STORIES'

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I  
LONDON

A

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## I. LONDON IN GENERAL

I CAN present my readers with no facts about the increase of population in London, about its wealth, about its imports and exports. Some local knowledge of antiquarian, literary, and historical account belongs to me, but to disclose it would be a scrappy performance of what has been done admirably by my betters.

I propose, as a very constant Londoner, to write about London generally, as it strikes my fancy and sympathy. I do not know that I have had very many predecessors in the occupation. A Londoner takes London as a matter of course. Its habits and its average tone are familiar to him; he lives with people who practise the one and affect the other; it does not occur to him that they need exposition. But London, absolutely as a whole, is a subject for an epigram or a library. One must take divisions of some sort, either of trades or abstract subjects or places: it is easiest to take divisions of place, made for



one already, and meaning very often great differences of nature, and for the most part these shall be my divisions. I invite you, as it were, to 'take a walk down' this or that street or district, and to listen the while to a chattering companion. If I trouble you with a single detail of fact it will be by accident. I propose to myself ideas only, stray fancies that have remained with me, not facts,—no foothold of land, as it were *cœlum undique et undique pontus*: and enough of preamble, let us set sail.

To many people London is the great mart of the world. But I confess that to me the knowledge that it is richer than any other city is neither agreeable nor even interesting. For my own comfort I should like it to be a great deal poorer. Its wealth almost stifles one. The large number of spacious, pompous houses of which one knows that the inhabitants have at least seven thousand a year is appalling: nay, I am told by a statistician that there are enough millionaires in our midst to hold a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square. Of course the current tone among them, if you except the more vulgar kind, is to pretend to be quite poor: they have no ready money, and so forth. No doubt this

homage to the seemliness of poverty is well meant, but I think it exaggerates the nuisance. You may philosophise about it as much as you like, but I am quite certain that the hardships of poverty are harder for the proximity of monstrous wealth. And it is annoying to wait, as in the season, twenty minutes before one can cross Piccadilly by reason of the charioted examples of our plutocracy. No: the wealth of London makes it a less agreeable place to live in than when it was poorer and smaller, 'the Town' of a hundred years ago. And is the wealth interesting? Are a hundred million sovereigns more interesting than a hundred million cheeses? Civilisation? It comes of training and habit, not of money: there was no vast quantity of that among the ancient Athenians. Empire? If our Empire meant no more than that many comfortable people in London have too much to spend, it would have little food for our imagination; and if those people and our Empire interact as cause and effect, why, then they are not its most lovely feature. Platitudes: but it is worth noting that one does not love one's London for this or that. It is not to me, again, the scene of gaiety and splendid

pleasures. It is never gay, and its pleasures are mostly stupid and tedious. Nor the centre of art and literature and intellect: in which regard one can only say that it contains the National Gallery and the British Museum.

London, to me, is the great meeting-place of the humours of the uncivilised North. I say uncivilised, because civilisation robs humour of its material: the perfectly civilised man does not act humorously, he acts reasonably, and there is nothing humorous in consistent reason: it is the dullest thing under heaven. May I never live where there are no irrational people! And I say North, because it is the verdict of all social philosophers that the northern climate (and especially our English) breeds more humours than are found elsewhere: I like to be on the side of the majority, though I have a suspicion that a hot sun has its peculiar humours also. Perhaps one may say that if there is equal food for humour in the South there is less capacity to digest it. The North is the place for humours, and nowhere else have they such scope as in London; nowhere else does grave-faced folly show such merry changes. With sufficient

variety in your societies you may pass the day with ever fresh oddities and perversities. And therein is an obvious gift of London: any intelligent person, however poor in pocket, may live in half a dozen contrasting sets; if he cannot pass from dukes to costers, at least he may pass from costers to cab-drivers.

These humours are mostly grey in our time: it is a specially lucky accident alone that will bring us on black and red. But if you can read—a rarer accomplishment than it is supposed—your London will grow dearer in another way. You tread where trod, you may easily live where lived, the brilliant and coloured beings you love in memoirs and letters. London is no longer England in the sense that once it was, and since space, as we say, is annihilated, place is no longer all important. But here, if anywhere in England, will place assist imagination to a sense of pleasant bygone atmospheres.

For these reasons, and such as these, not for its greatly illusory importance and its materially monotonous pleasures, whether he knows it or not, is London dear to the true Londoner. I speak of all classes. Indeed it is my belief that in the so-called upper and

middle classes there are quite few real Londoners left. I do not count as such men who work in the City all day and go to a suburb for their sleep and social life, still less their wives and daughters. And I grudge the name to those owners of town houses who make London dismal for nine months in the year with blinds and shutters. There is, it is true to say, a small number of people whose England comprises London—I hate ambiguity, but this must be understood or not—wherever they are. But in the main, true Londoners are they who have lived since manhood three-quarters of the year in London, with time to take to themselves its shifting tones—and they are not a large number of City, professional, and idling men. This of the upper and middle classes. In the lower there are many, fairly quick-witted and free-living, who are true Londoners, and would be miserable elsewhere. And, by the way, you need not keep to the snob's division: you may add to these very many men, especially young men (later to lose their London for the most part), whose sense of life and essential habits are the same. I may rest my argument on these. What they would miss elsewhere is just the humours of their fellows

acting and reacting on their own, which can thrive in no place but London. So a Londoner loves it from habit. He may weary of it, and it may not hold his happiest memories; but it holds the average of his life, and he must not desert it for ever, lest he starve. So much of London as a whole: I start on my chosen divisions.

## II. THE CITY

I TAKE the City first, wishing to get it off my hands. I dislike it. I do not hate it, I am glad to say. If I hated it, it might acquire an irresistible attraction for me, as the way is with things and people one hates, so that I should wander down there every day and end by growing offensively rich. But I dislike it: its sole criterion of merit is particularly annoying to a scribbler, and it has a habit of regulating its courtesies thereby. Elsewhere in London, though everywhere the quantity of money a man may have or lack is raised to an irrational importance (for you gain nothing by A's millions and lose nothing by B's bankruptcy), other qualities in him are allowed to exist: in the City, if he is bare of funds, he is bare of everything, a mark for British manners in their skeleton form. I will deal with it plainly, and pass to more agreeable phases of human stupidity.

Stupidity—yes: I maintain that the City is of all things stupid. Its want of commonly

intelligent observation is illustrated by the fact that no City man ever contradicts the popular fallacies concerning it. There is the idea that in the City men walk swiftly about, with set, anxious faces. They do no such thing. There are more aimless, indifferent loafers in the streets of the City than in any other part of London, the Strand itself not excepted. If a man of dramatic sense were to walk swiftly, with a set face, he would be obstructed by a larger mass of semi-stationary and purposeless humanity than anywhere else. The City is not the busy place it is supposed to be. The busier part of the community plays dominoes in restaurants, the less busy converses with hats back-tilted and hands in pockets: the idle part looks wearily at goods it obviously does not intend to buy in shop-windows. Inside the offices strangers are made to wait half an hour and (if they are poor) given a curt five minutes, but this is merely a pretence to impress them: friends are welcome as a change from the newspaper, and held in lengthy conversations. But City men go on believing that everybody else there is busy to distraction.

Another fallacy about the City is that an



almost preternatural intelligence is required to thrive there. This also is vanity. City men are not intelligent, and even if you cannot expect people to admit this of themselves, they would admit it, if they were not stupid, of one another. I grant that in some departments, as in speculation on the Stock Exchange, intelligence is a useful aid to sound information, but in most all that is needed is a mastery of routine which anybody can acquire in an hour or two. The rest is a matter of capital. Average intelligence may get the better in the long-run of imbecility, but that is all. Study faces in the City and compare them with faces in the law-courts—excluding the dock, the jury, and the witness-box—and your conclusion is inevitable. Or of whom do you expect the more amusing converse—of the average barrister and doctor of your acquaintance, or of the average City man? Why, even men of letters, with all the disadvantages of seclusion, talk better than City men. Wit and humour are surely a fair test of the matter: are you generally amused by the funny stories current in the City? With all my bitter experience of the public taste, I should not expect a fortune if I printed

them. And it is useless to tell me that City men do not set up for wits and humorists—that they are too busy. I do not admit their frantic preoccupation, as I have explained, but as a matter of fact they are professed wits, if not humorists: they vaunt their jokes wherever they go. It will not do: intelligence is in a poor way in the City, and I am convinced that any man possessing it who will take some technical trouble may make his fortune there.

I do not wish, however, to appear prejudiced against the City. I should not so appear, for I have accused it merely of idleness and stupidity, and I am quite at home with both these qualities. But I will pass to direct eulogy. A matter on which I can frankly congratulate the City is its unexpected beauty of nomenclature. I had to visit two solicitors there the other day, and one of them lived in Idol Lane and the other in St. Michael's Vicarage. I passed Rood Lane on the way, and I believe Harp Lane is thereabouts. There is an Angel Court, if I am not mistaken. What spots are these for spiritual poets and shadowy chroniclers of the beautiful! It is said that the hazards of commerce are the true romance of modern

life. What wonder, indeed, is this when commerce dates from such addresses? How they bring before you the medieval Church, saints and martyrs and lovely ritual! Poetry makes shift with Mecklenburgh Square or Porchester Terrace. But I almost regret that the beautiful City names are old: I would grant our City men a grim and diabolical humour had they invented them.

I may with sincerity congratulate the City on another quality—its reticent dignity. I have heard men, indeed, in City restaurants vaunt their dealings with thousands, but I conceive that this was not vanity, but business: imaginary thousands were a bait for solid tens. And in any case the men were not fairly representative. Your City man of a good type makes it a point of honour neither to vaunt success nor to bemoan failure. He will learn of loss quietly, and with little acrimony against those who have inflicted it. This is a good quality, part of that gift of public order which is the civilisation of the North, as that of the South is the gift of social happiness. I like this quality, but I am reminded that beyond the City, where it is in its place, it spreads too far, as concerned with money. In the City, where

the game is wholly one of money, to mention riches is to brag of success, to mention poverty is to confess defeat. So it is well to do neither there. But in other places, where money need not be the alpha and omega of life, I think reticence concerning it goes too far. It has an ugly implication. It implies, firstly, that a man's money, or lack of it, is the most sacred matter in his life. And the only explanation why the mention by a man of his poverty makes his hearers uncomfortable is that poverty is thought a necessary discredit. Nobody is inconvenienced by the mention of gout or some other such ill fortune. And the idea that poverty is discreditable is merely the most offensive, as it is perhaps the most inevitable, characteristic of a materially successful race. But I wander from the City.

In setting down such ideas of it as have come to me for the moment, I have written of the City as such, of City men as I have seen them there. It is of course absurd to define men nowadays by so narrow a limit. Men of every society are found in the City—men of fashion, if the phrase be current still, sportsmen, men of pleasure, even lovers of books. When they leave the City every day,

they for the most part leave it entirely, and become something quite other than City men till they return the next day. The City man who lived there, and was nothing else, was of a past generation. Yet it is foolish to suppose that habits of mind in practice for several hours every day do not unconsciously linger when those hours are over; and I think the contemporary fact that men of every society and set are engaged in commerce has its connection with the contemporary fact that every society and set tends to take money for its chief consideration. Is it absolutely a national habit? One sees it everywhere nowadays. Even they who ought to be Bohemian, brilliant young people who write and paint, are reckoning their royalties and sales. It is a little depressing. It is hard but that a universal atmosphere should get into individual lungs, so that those in whose pursuits merit brings little money and faults bring much may be tempted to desertion or regrets. But if a man's aim in life be money chiefly, he should go where money is. No amount of fretting an artistic conscience will bring him a large fortune. He should go into the City and try his wits, and if I am right about intelligence,

he should succeed. It is not altogether an unamusing place. An uncompromising aim and standard produce a rough cynicism that sometimes refreshes one in the muddle of opposing theories. The element of gambling is pervasive and stimulating. No, it is not altogether a dull place, but I decline to believe in the constancy of its energy, the breadth of its intelligence, or the cleverness of its jokes.

### III. THE STRAND

WHO would dare to write anything of Fleet Street? Not I, and in fact I am glad to say I know but little of it, greatly disliking its appearance. We come westwards to the Strand. But I cannot avoid writing about myself if I am to write about the Strand, because such amenities as it has for me are entirely a matter of childish associations. Those who have none of these pleasant memories cannot appreciate it as I; but I fancy many people are in my own case. If I were to come upon the Strand for the first time to-day, it is likely it would not engage my sympathies very warmly. If you cared to point out to me that it is obstructive and evil-smelling, and peopled by an unattractive type of loafer, I could make no defence of it. Taken as it stands, its evils are indefensible. But to me and some others, from ten years old to fifteen, the Strand was a sort of Mecca of pleasure-lovers: it meant theatres—there were few then west of it in town—and

theatres were then the acknowledged princes of amusement. Pleasant was the sight of it when one went to the play comfortably with one's people, and pleasant the sight of it when one sneaked there alone—as I boast to have done at twelve—with enough money for an afternoon pit. At fifteen or so, however, your British schoolboy grows sophisticated and (in all probability) a bit of a snob, and he becomes aware that the Strand and its theatres are not the haunt of the aristocratic *roué*. It is then no longer Mecca—merely a casual oasis in the desert of boyhood's routine. But I am happy to say that in my own case this knowledge was counter-balanced by another attraction. For some reason, which I cannot recall, it was in the Strand that I localised that life of impecunious but persistent pleasure-seeking which I read of in the *Sporting Times*, a life which I sturdily believed to be unceasingly brilliant, and the details of which (I believed them all to be true) I read every week with religious care in my study at school. The idea of this life quite fascinated me—its joyous carelessness, its cynicism, its behind-the-scenesness, its lack of discipline and moderation. I hope it was all real: it was



an agreeable atmosphere to my imagination. Well—I placed it in the Strand, and on my way to a theatre I looked wistfully at the passers-by, as who might see unconsciously one of those brilliant beings whom I did not know. And then at nineteen came the university, and one's 'comrades of college,' as Florac called them, introduced one to other quarters of public pleasure a trifle more exciting than the old, and so the Strand slid down from its pedestal.

But now when I walk down it these memories of pleasure, partly enjoyed, but in greater measure imaginary, are stronger and sweeter far than those I have as I pass the scenes of later and more actual amusement. The gala pleasures, as it were, of early manhood are not, so far as London is concerned, most agreeable to recollect: they were most often tedious, not seldom coarse and even vulgar. The philosopher of maturer years remembers them perhaps without the weakness of regrets, but he has small desire indeed to re-enact them, and the places where they were pursued have little charm about them. But in childhood there was, even about pleasures so little ethereal as play-going, a quality of imagination which

redeemed them from banality and connected them with the finer pleasures—in childhood or in later life—that come of imagination working on books. And I would even claim that the callow boy's imagination of such trite gaieties as I have indicated, his vague idea of brilliant dissipation, is not without its excusable quality of temperament: certainly it is better than the actual dissipation of succeeding years, and its locality may be honoured without shame.

So the Strand with its malodorous restaurants, and uninteresting shops, and loafing, soulless crowds, is dear to me in a way. Of its actual state, as it appears to older eyes, there is nothing very pleasant to say. It is the haunt still of lesser actors, who go there, I suppose, on business or to meet their friends. The stage, like the turf, marks the faces of its servants, and they preserve, as far as they are allowed, the ancient and picturesque instinct of distinctive dress. But that charm, of faces or of dress, is not enduring, if I may say so. Even the air of importance, which I admit is amusing at first, somewhat palls upon me. . . .

A great portion of a Strand crowd is, I admit, not certainly intelligible to me. I

mean those people, neither obviously actors nor journalists nor betting men, who drag themselves wearily along and look in at shop-windows. They are mostly young men, and I conjecture that these are the counterpart, on a lower plane of the social hierarchy, of the men who stroll down Piccadilly of a morning. Just as the country squire and the man home from India like to stroll to their clubs down Piccadilly, so, I imagine, does the young provincial clerk, in town for a few days' pleasuring, and not knowing what to do with his mornings, loaf wearily about the Strand, and look at photographs in shop-windows and the halls of theatres. My occasions take me too seldom to the Strand to be acquainted by sight with its constant figures, familiar, no doubt, to its habitual frequenters. The only one I can remember who used at one time to give it coherence, as it were, and continuity to me, was a sporting peer (now deceased) of some notoriety, a man extraordinary for his hats and remarkable for his waistcoats: he was often in the Strand when I passed it, and was easy to remember. Do you not like these familiar, personally unknown faces, who seem always to meet you in certain

parts of the town? There is an old gentleman I always see in St. James's Street, and a younger I always see in Piccadilly, when I take my walks abroad: I do not know who either of them is, but I have many personal acquaintances whose death would pain me less. I regret I have no such unknown familiar in the Strand.

No, the Strand as I see it now does not attract me. But these memories, imperfect, banal, as you may think them, prevent my speaking ill of it. What days, when the theatre was real enchantment—even the theatre in contemporary London! Love of the footlights dies hard, but it is tried with tolerable severity. Even then the delight must have been suggestive mainly. When, at sixteen, one sat in one's stall at the Gaiety with a gardenia in one's button-hole and a stick, as the custom was then, between one's knees, it was not, I suppose, the wit of Mr. Burnand's puns, or Miss Gilchrist's poses, or even the catching vivacity of Miss Nelly Farren, that formed one's chief enjoyment. One had heard stories—ah, dear precocious days when behind-the-scenes was mystery and cynicism a joy! They must not pull down the Strand in my time.

#### IV. ST. JAMES'S AND MAYFAIR

I WRITE of these two parishes together, because if to-day their atmospheres differ vastly, a hundred years ago and earlier—and that is more important—their atmospheres were much the same. It would be easy to give you a list of engaging persons who lived in one and the other, but it is not necessary. When you think of the town of a century to a century and a half ago, you think of these parishes: it extended farther eastwards, to be sure, but these remain with much of their old appearance, and the persistence of fashion in them to some extent helps to make familiar the fashion of old days. In Mayfair and St. James's lived those dear people with elaborate manners whose rudeness on occasion could be so very much to the point, those men who bowed with such an ample grace to one another and presently ran one another through the middle, those women who wrote 'Dear Sir' to their most intimate friends and reduced

the scandal they whispered behind their fans to terms so elementary. They were so punctilious in little things, those dear people, and so courageous when it came to the things that matter. Heigho, they had something to talk about! 'Have you heard the new use for a bed-curtain ring, my dear?' 'Lord, child, what can you mean?' "'Tis to get married with.' 'My dear——' 'As I'm a person of honour, 'tis true. His Grace of Hamilton hath set the fashion. He must get himself married in the night, so he wakes up your neighbour the parson, and for want of a ring prepared—you conceive the occasion was something of the hastiest—he weds the blushing nymph with a bed-curtain ring.' 'Last night—married—why, who——' 'The happy virgin, my dear, was the incomparable Gunning.' 'That——' 'Hush! my dear, you speak of her Grace of Hamilton.' They must have enjoyed their conversation.

I am prepared to hear you say that the savour of these times is coarse, something animal. It is so easy to be misled by the use of periphrases for monosyllables. All the scandal that ever was talked comes to elementary facts: I suggest that the clash

of swords makes a better accompaniment for it—merely from an æsthetic point of view—than the growl of heavy leading articles. But it is monstrously simple to suppose that the lives led in Mayfair and St. James's a hundred years ago were more elementary than those led to-day. The 'morals' of idle and wealthy people in every age are, climate for climate, much alike. My own belief is that the more highly placed of the older period were less materialised: certainly money, as such, was of less importance to them, and taste of greater. Appreciation of the arts came chiefly from them, as it certainly comes not now. Morals, in the limited sense to which we are accustomed, are coloured by such a fact, though they may not be changed. But I claim only equality. Unless humanity in general disgust you, there is nothing that should disgust you in particular with the lives of these parishes in past centuries.

If one had to say offhand what were the characteristics of Mayfair and St. James's that distinguish the eighteenth century and some years of the next from our latter days, one might say that the material characteristic was colour, the spiritual was irony. The

former difference is too obvious for comment. Horace Walpole asked Lady Townshend to choose his clothes for his niece's wedding: she chose him 'a white ground with purple and green flowers.' I should like to have seen such wedding-guests trooping to a house in Pall Mall, with a May sun shining his best on them. As for the irony, I think it distinguished that time from ours even more than did the brocade and the purple. The letters and memoirs picture it constantly; it was evidently the tone of pleasant breeding. To relate the most eccentric of actions with a grave dispassionateness—to regard life as an amused, indifferent spectator, that was the right air. It is almost gone, I imagine. People take life as a bicycle race: they took it then as a saunter. The 'pace' in one sense was perhaps greater, but there were longer breathing-times and pauses. Hence irony was possible: people struggling to keep heads above social water—or to push them under—cannot be dispassionate in their comments.

So the atmosphere that imagination calls up in the parishes is that of a picturesque game of life, a leisurely dance, with the exhilaration in the air that came from hidden



currents of hot blood and desires accomplishing themselves without fear or scruple. And some charm of those frontless, uncompromising, patched beauties, and of the men who drank and gambled and intrigued in politics and love, and fought for their country and fought one another and sometimes shot themselves—some charm of a gayer, statelier, more brightly wicked time lingers in the places where they lived.

To me the charm of these places is almost wholly of the past. But I must venture an idea or two of the present. As I said, Mayfair and St. James's have different atmospheres, the one from the other, now. Mayfair suggests plutocracy. St. James's is rather impecunious than otherwise: there are so many stray men of poor fortunes in its attics. St. James's Square and a few houses in St. James's Place are about the only harbourage of whole families, plutocratic or otherwise: the rest is clubs and shops and lodging-houses. In the ten years or so that my acquaintance with St. James's Street has been constant, it seems to be growing less dignified. There is—it seems to me—more blatant noise of newspaper-boys, more orange-peel, more bits of paper

in the street than was once the case. But St. James's remains the district of all others in town where a stray man should live, unless he live in the Temple. It has associations and a pleasant atmosphere of a kind even now. The Palace and the guards outside it, and the house across the way, give it dignity for the circuit of a rood or so. It does not swarm with miscellaneous crowds on Sunday, as does Piccadilly, but there is always some interest of humanity as you stroll about or look out of a club window. The milk is carried round by women with the pails slung across their shoulders; they suggest a game of Arcadia. There is a gratification also in living near St. James's Square, certainly the most dignified square in the town. I have never been able to understand how anybody not the twentieth duke of his family and the possessor of several estates in the country can presume to live in St. James's Square, and I have always felt it to be an honour and a pledge of a dignified life to live, as it were, round the corner of it. It speaks of ducal lines. And so the Palace speaks of Courts, though to be sure the last Court interesting to me was held in Whitehall. But I am drifting back to old times:

enough to say that St. James's is the proper district for your single man.

Those who need a whole house may go to Mayfair, if (by the way) they can afford it. But one can only speak of its present state in a sorrowful whisper. The names of its streets and the appearance of its houses, or many of them, warrant your living there, if you must be fashionable. It is still a thousand times preferable to Belgravia—the shoddy-looking, the ugly beyond compare. But it has heart-breaking associations with mere millionaires, with wealth run to fatness, never to elegance. It has taken to itself a heavy, dull appearance; there are parts of it where I am forced to repeat old letters by heart to withstand the force of present pomp and tedium. Still—we must make the best of it. It is the best we have in the way of domestic fashion. But I can't write more of it without quotations.

## V. PICCADILLY

'Though I be fair as a powdered peruke,  
And once was a gaping silly,  
Your Whitechapel Countess will prove, Lord Duke,  
She's a regular tiger lily :  
She 'll fight you with cold steel and she 'll run you off your  
legs  
Down the length of Piccadilly.'

YES, there was a time when exciting things happened in Piccadilly, but one has to go for them, as Mr. Meredith has gone, at least to the first quarter of the century. Nowadays the eyes of the nation are not fixed on a handful of social heroes and heroines, so that even were a discarded wife to chase her false fleeting lord along the edge of the Green Park few people would hear of the event, in spite of our wonderful Press. But I doubt if anything of interest, reported or not, ever happens now in Piccadilly. If our manners are less elaborate than our ancestors' were, we are certainly more self-contained. Few people 'let themselves go' anywhere, least of all in a public thoroughfare: the exceptions

are controlled by the police. And I fancy the habit of interested sauntering has declined; we hurry from one stupid occasion to another in cabs and omnibuses, and we lose our acquaintances in the crowd. Our reminiscences will contain but few remarkable encounters in the street.

All the same, there is still a significance in Piccadilly. That is to say, from Bond Street to Hyde Park Corner: from Bond Street eastwards to the Circus there is no significance at all, merely shops and an obstructive flow of vacuous humanity. But walk from Bond Street westwards on a fine day about half-past twelve in the morning, and as you go down the slope you feel that you are in the spacious middle of social London, in the part of it that means Town—as Mr. Kipling sings to his banjo—to men who have known Town, when they hear the word in Australia or on the Niger. And that is the part that attracts them when they return. Some house in the country is dearer, perhaps, but they feel that they are back in Town when they walk down the slope of Piccadilly. Their minds may contain little of the social memories of the place: they may not think of the Duke in his duck trousers or of ‘old Q’ in his

unrepentant age, but there, if anywhere, Town stirs in their blood.

I do not think it can be a merely personal and individual pleasure that comes to me when on a fine morning I look down Piccadilly from the top of the slope. I have observed it often in others, and I always fancy that people look brighter, with a blander eye on the world, here than elsewhere in London. For myself, I am conscious of a sort of ludicrous increase of importance, as though here one were less of an ant on an ant-hill and more of a necessary screw in the machine. I feel almost as one having a definite and not despicable place in the community, who can hold up his head and meet the world with a smile, not dodge it round a corner. Perhaps it is that one's mind unconsciously surveys its memories of those who have strolled down Piccadilly,—not only those whose achievements or fortune have been infinitely greater, but those who have come to infinitely worse grief; and it unconsciously reminds itself that the descent is not altogether completed. Some have so walked down Piccadilly and continued their walking till they did it on tottering but honoured feet: others have walked down

Piccadilly and walked away into some unknown Inferno. I will not trouble you with the associations of this or that house: perhaps they too add to one's importance, as one feels solemn in a graveyard.

There are folk who have no right in Piccadilly of a morning. Those whose interests are comprised in their money gains and losses; those whose clothes, whether old or new, are worn uneasily; those who stare and scowl at their neighbours, and those who cannot dissimulate their success in life, —all these profane ones are requested to absent themselves. In the afternoon let them return: regretfully then I abandon Piccadilly to the plutocrat; by all means let him arrive there from the City and stare at his kith and kin in the crawling carriages. In the morning it is for amiable people, who saunter idly or march with a brisk swing, people affable with their eyes, who assume that those they meet are their brothers and enjoy, they also, a pleasant outlook on life, free from fret and snobbery and every baseness. Let them sniff the morning air and take the town as a natural place, and forget its gorging gold and suffocated millions.

All this of fine mornings in general, and

especially of the early spring, before London is used up and all men's faces are grown pale with too effectual pleasures. In the afternoon, as I said, the place is different. Something foetid has descended in the air, the red sheen is gone from the omnibuses, the idle saunter is exchanged for the painful crawl, and the brisk swing for the blatant swagger; the baser racial instincts have come atop.

In the evenings there is a new enchantment. But unless you be a triple-brass philosopher, to enjoy it you must drive; walking you find the national superiority in morals a little too disagreeable. But drive, drive up Piccadilly this time, not down, and observe the lines of lamps in the darkness, the one line by the seemly houses, the other by the black trees. Do they not suggest to you something vaguely but pervadingly romantic?

In the morning there was the feeling of what social charm and interest there may be in a town; at night there is the feeling of its possibilities of adventure. It is, of course, quite a different romance from that of grey moors and distant lights in old windows: this romance is gay in its quality, even feverish. You may be driving home



from a quiet dinner-party, to go quietly to bed; but do you not find a romance in this line of lamps leading into the heart of the town, where life, you imagine for a moment, is at some heat of interest? There it lies before you, multitudes of human things with hearts and fancies, countless abodes of mystery. You lean back and continue your course, without a regret, to your peaceful and respectable dwelling-place, but for a moment there was the sense of romance, a faint wave against your brain of the blood that craves adventure. A fleeting fancy: as I write it is gone: words do but riddle it. As you draw into the closer traffic, romance has flown, the closer sight of your fellow-creatures, unless you be very young, has killed it. Perhaps it was not a very edifying thing while it was with you. But nowhere else in London, as in Piccadilly by night, shall you feel it. And for it, as for my morning's stroll down the slope, do I count Piccadilly precious beyond words.

## VI. BAYSWATER AND ST. JOHN'S WOOD

I AM quite prepared to be charged with a morbid extremity of cowardice when I confess that Bayswater terrifies me. But the confession is necessary, for this terror is the proof of Bayswater's qualities, and without it Bayswater cannot be explained. Yes: when I walk through the wide-stretching mass of monotonous ugliness, behind all my artistic loathing there is fear—cold, deadly fear. I sometimes wonder if the fear may be directly personal; if, in spite of science and all that, it is an intimation that some day Bayswater will stretch forth a callous hand and take me to itself, and I shall become a Bayswater householder. We are weak creatures, driven here and there by circumstance, and the world is strong. Who can tell if he too may not some day walk down an ugly, soulless, monotonous Bayswater street, and stand aghast as he remembers that in such a house his lot is fixed

for evermore, till the green-roofed house receives his weary body?

He may cry aloud and beat his breast, and protest that his soul craves for beautiful things: it will be in vain—he must take out his latch-key and enter. Circumstance has been too strong for him: he is a Bayswater householder.

But this is a nightmare, and after all the fear may have a less personally horrible explanation. It may be that Bayswater affects me in the same manner that I should be affected by the dust of the Sahara, and have been affected by a grey-coloured sea, when the sky is sunless. It is the effect of limitless monotony. You walk through squares and streets and ‘gardens’ and ‘terraces,’ and they are all the same. Square succeeds square with no individual difference. Consequently one is afraid, feeling one’s own narrow limits and very finite condition, one’s tendency to change and caprice, one’s development and the end thereof—feeling all this and feeling Bayswater’s uniformity and immutability and vastness. Not to speak it profanely, Bayswater suggests eternity, and that, as we all know, depresses even the most buoyant of us.

## BAYSWATER AND ST. JOHN'S WOOD 39

It is difficult for me to conceive the inhabitants of Bayswater—when I think of them in the mass—as not doing the same things, strictly and absolutely, every day. It is difficult for me to imagine that they are born and marry and grow old and die. I think of them involuntarily as eating the same breakfasts, reading the same newspapers, saying the same things at dinner every day. I am even inclined to think that such must be the case of the essential inhabitants, and that the people living there whom I know must be necessarily different from the others.

If surroundings affect people at all, surely to be surrounded by countless houses all exactly the same as one's own must encourage the monotony of life to which most of us are prone already. If you pass through some of those outlying suburbs which consist of rows upon rows of little confined houses, it is odd but that you think with pity on the tame and dreary lives of their tenants. You have no pity in Bayswater, because you assume that most of the people are well-to-do, and many of the houses indicate opulence. But monotony is monotony everywhere, and these prisoners are merely exercised in a

slightly wider circle. For my part, I pity neither society, knowing that both are tolerably happy, as doing what they are accustomed to do, and being afraid that the impertinence might be resented. But if you are to be concerned for the soulless lives of your fellow-creatures, you have quite as much reason to argue lack of soul in Bayswater as in the poorer parts of Wandsworth and Clapham; the raiment and fare are better, and that is all. One may be more rightly concerned, however, with the ugliness of Bayswater than with its monotony, because it is really not good for a community to have quite such bad taste as the English public, and if you are ever puzzled by that taste you have only to walk about Bayswater to understand it. But this lament is growing as dull as the place; let us go on to St. John's Wood.

St. John's Wood gratifies the mind with a contrast, because whereas the idea of Bayswater is of dulness and respectability and opulently bad taste, that of St. John's Wood is of two things frequently conjoined in the British mind—art and immorality. As to the latter, I had best say frankly at once that I do not believe in it. My belief is that the

public eye has been deceived by the number of houses in St. John's Wood which have high-walled gardens; it does not understand that a wish to avoid it may exist for reasons not immoral. Or else it opines that there is a suspicious prettiness about it: the necessity of ugliness to morality is still a lurking conviction. Or else the idea of immorality simply follows on that of art, for there still exists a gloomy suspicion that all art not religious, or at least didactic, is vicious.

St. John's Wood suggests art in concrete forms. It does not perhaps speak to one's soul of art eternal, but the knowledge that many houses in St. John's Wood are inhabited by actors and painters bestows on it a glamour of a sort. Moreover, it contains some rather beautiful gardens, so that it repeats Campden Hill, with the fascinating addition of mystery and recklessness. These qualities, it is true, may come to it from the old idea in which I have said I do not believe. But it is a happy fact of psychology that we may have to abandon a belief that may yet illogically retain its associations. I have abandoned the belief in the immorality of St. John's Wood, but I still feel there—and bless therefor my want of logic—that the

place is mysterious; that could one pass through keyholes, one would happen on romances and adventures. To live there would not be to suffer the staling of custom. There would be a stimulus as one walked down the road of one's house, haply shaded with trees, and went to one's study looking into a pleasant old garden. The sound of a passing cab would suggest some dark intrigue, and set one dreaming. . . . A pleasant place, most agreeable after Bayswater.

## VII. KENSINGTON AND HAMMERSMITH

I SUPPOSE it was the existence of Kensington Palace that induced the inhabitants of various other districts, such as Brompton, Hammersmith, and Ladbroke Grove, to call them South Kensington, West Kensington, and so forth. It is a rather curious instance of the great national characteristic parading itself undisguised. It annoys me to think of it, because these other places have a right to their proper names and to the histories and associations thereof.

But before I can say agreeable things of Kensington, I must dispose of its melancholy High Street. I think it one of the saddest sights in London, interesting perhaps to the impartial observer of human society, but a sore to the patriot, and a stumbling-block to the optimist. Crowds and crowds of women, loitering outside shops, gazing anxiously at the goods in the windows! Women with no sign of compelling poverty about them,



spending long mornings and afternoons loitering, gazing, searching for little bargains to adorn themselves withal. Where, I have asked myself, is the higher education of women we hear of, the emancipation, the thought, the soul, the intelligence? For years and years we have had no time to attend to anything except the purity and poetry and secret yearnings and intellectual progress of woman, independent woman, and—here she is, loitering and gazing—in her right place, says the ‘cynical man of the world,’ but it afflicts me dreadfully. At Hammersmith Broadway also one sees loiterers, but they are there for love of loitering and idling simply, to exchange open-air chaff with their acquaintance, to enjoy life, not to hunt for mean bargains. They are a genuine folk, leading, if one may judge from a glance, practical lives—lives, that is to say, in consonance with their tastes, which lean to simple pleasures rather than to getting on in the world by hard work. The scene is cheerful, careless; the talk is open, friendly, with a pleasant smack of irresponsibility in its phrases. The scene in Kensington High Street is posing and anxious, the talk mincing.

Happily, however, that is not all of Kensington: one may turn with relief to its pleasant Gardens, and the spacious, comely houses in its northern quarter. It was my fortune as a child often to stay in one of them, and to be taken for my walk in the Gardens every fine morning, and the west gate, hard by the Palace, was, as it were, the entrance to a wide field of possible romance. We walked as far as the Albert Memorial, which I regarded as a thing of mere magnificence, not having been taught its offences against art: I feel kindly towards it yet, and should be extremely sorry if some secret society of artistic persons were to blow it up. So Kensington Gardens have a place in my dreams of childhood, and doubtless have one in many another sentimentalist's memories, and one might have an uglier background. I do not profess to regard the Palace with any particular interest. English society was extremely interesting when the King lived there, but the Court was the least interesting section of it, and Kensington Palace has no associations of romance or of beauty. But there are other houses hard by which suggest comely things of the past and the present. I remember one with gratitude for its uncon-

scious influence. It was of Queen Anne's date, and had much old oak about it, with a garden large for the town, and a high wall which shut out London altogether. I should like to buy it if ever I am rich—or is it a fatal thing to resume associations of many years ago? I fancy it is. I know that when I have gone back to my old school I have been quite unable to push back old feelings, and a word of command from the headmaster would have dissipated my manhood's self-respect in a moment and been followed by instant obedience. So that a house familiar to one's childhood—not, that is to say, constantly familiar since, and so as it were growing with one's growth—would be like to send one dreaming day and night,—and one commonly dreams too much for a literal world as it is. As for one's present regard for houses in this quarter, one connects them somehow with art in comfort, with fine taste and money to exercise it withal. Perhaps the spirit of art shines brighter in a student's garret, but it is only 'perhaps' after all, and the weaker brethren may be allowed to prefer spaciousness and soft cushions. These large and oldish houses on Campden Hill suggest art and comfort

to one in passing them, whether or no the insides of them correspond thereto.

It is all a matter of temperament, if you like better such suggestions as these or those of little houses in the Hammersmith Road. These latter suggest a life less fine, less delicate, less remote, but a life more restive and ardent and in a superficial sense more real. The Dickens temperament of quick sympathy with common things prefers the latter, and I think there should be moments when we all prefer those smaller and warmer suggestions. A home precariously supported by hard work, having in it the bond of common anxieties and what perhaps you call vulgar pleasures—is it not at times and for a moment warmer to one's sympathies than a life of refined ease, of assured immunity from essential privations? One would not cant about different measures of affections, which are as likely to be strong in one as in the other life, but we may feel the throb of a struggle for common existence which was the aboriginal rule. The master of the little house has had a good day's takings in his shop or (haply) a successful day on the turf; the mistress can go with him to the music hall: or perhaps he has had a knock-down blow,

and they must look out for two little rooms in a back street. At times one sympathises with such events as much as with the fortunate purchaser of a Velasquez. In literature, of course, it may or may not be one's preference to linger with vulgar joys and troubles—for my own part I think we have had enough and to spare of them in books, and but for the rigid rule of the market which insists that writers should write the same book over and over again, I would exhort some professors of the humble to turn their minds to Queen Anne houses and beautiful backgrounds. In life, however, one should not resent the sight of the little houses on the Hammersmith Road, nor resent the large houses with pleasant gardens on Campden Hill. They are near together in place, and it may be well if one turns easily from the one to the other in imaginative sympathy. It may have been some such idea that induced me to join them together.

## VIII. THE SUBURBS

I HAVE observed that to live anywhere in England may be made a reproach, a scoffing, if not a hissing: a curious sign it is of an instinctive pessimism. 'Cockney,' 'provincial,' 'suburban,' are all adjectives of evil import, but the worst of these is 'suburban.' 'Cockney' has something qualifying in its connotation, and 'provincial' has some air of excuse, but 'suburban' is wholly scornful and indignant, without one plea of kindness. 'It will be popular in the suburbs' is the last word of contempt for a work of art, and 'suburban' is the commonest missile thrown at a maker of books or plays. In the days when depreciators of Dr. Ibsen still throve in the land, they used to call him suburban, by way of a triumphant assertion of a taste superior to his eulogists. I have never been able to understand it. The average taste of the London suburbs in things artistic is much the same—you will find it difficult to differentiate it—as that of the rest of England.

Not a good taste, to be sure—but why the invidious selection? The inhabitants of the suburbs are leavened as much as any others. Horace Walpole, surely one of the most urban of men, preferred Twickenham to Arlington Street and Berkeley Square, and for much the same reasons as the city clerk of to-day might prefer it to an abode possible for him in town; he liked the greater spaciousness and the ‘greeneth and blueth’ of the comparative country. Or if you say that Twickenham was not a suburb then, I will—with great reluctance—drop Horace Walpole and come to the present day. The greatest of living English poets lives in a suburb; and he who, in my opinion, is beyond intelligent question next to him, used to live in another. And any number of genuinely artistic and intellectual people live in parts of London which used to be called suburbs—Kensington and the like—and ought to be called suburbs now. Why, when the poor suburbs are mentioned, should we not sometimes think of them, and not of the common race of dullards who are the same all over England? I protest I am sorry for the suburbs, and indignant at their treatment.

The matter has gone so far that there are

suburbs whose very names make people laugh—with the laugh of indulgent superiority—even though they live themselves in suburbs. The mere mention of Tooting or Peckham Rye makes inhabitants of Richmond or Wimbledon roar with laughter. Why? I have heard people laugh heartily at the mere suggestion that anybody can live at Walham Green. Yet Peckham Rye and Walham Green are euphonious names, and I defy you to mention any ridiculous association their names convey. I protest the humour is altogether too subtle for me.

A reason for the contempt in which the suburbs are held may be that their houses are ugly. They are ugly, it is true. As a result, I suppose, of that diffusion of prosperity and comfort of which we are all so proud, it is rapidly becoming impossible for a person of moderate means in England to escape squalid and hideous surroundings. Ivy-covered cottages near London are nearly all pulled down, and rows of little vile red villas occupy the ground. If you are not rich enough to live in a big house, standing in its own ample grounds, and with a high wall to shut out the view, you must live in a little vile villa or something like it. It is



your fault for being born into this highly civilised generation. But are London houses so beautiful? Mayfair, to be sure, is seemly, and has an atmosphere, and Bloomsbury has its virtues. But the tenants of unlovely, mean-garbed Belgravia need crow over no suburb in a ten mile circuit. Moreover, if most suburbs are ugly, some are very much the reverse, and when the word is mentioned, Sheen and Roehampton should qualify its ugly import.

Another reason for the contempt is, I suppose, the idea that the social life of a suburb is peculiarly mean and silly. This should be qualified by the fact that in many suburbs there is no social life at all. To the male inhabitants, at least, they are simply dormitories. There is also a qualification in the occasionally convenient fact that in some suburbs, as in London, you are absolved from neighbourly acquaintance. You may live for years in a suburb without knowing a single inhabitant, if you have enough of acquaintance elsewhere, or dislike human intercourse, or fear the quality of that about you. There is this negative qualification. Apart from that, I suppose it is likely that the society of a suburb may in its gradations have less

relevance to the essential facts of human existence than even that of a country town. In a country town there are other distinctions than those of apparent affluence or poverty, though the latter, no doubt, tend to be all supreme, and these other distinctions, albeit often ignorant and anachronistic, are not entirely sordid. Whereas in an inferior suburb nothing but apparent wealth has a vogue. But, after all, this is very much the case elsewhere, and the *reductio ad absurdum* in your suburb may entertain the minor philosopher. I know a suburb in which there is, as it were, a patrician and a plebeian quarter: both quarters are mainly peopled by tradesmen from the nearest part of London, but the patrician quarter has a fine, untempered scorn of the plebeian—will not know it, in fact. Such sordid features are silly. But we need hardly be angry with them, and, as I said, they are not appreciably worse than England shows in general. Against these I insist that the inhabitants of the many charming houses I have seen from the outside in more than one London suburb, in Richmond, Sheen, Wimbledon, cannot be other than amiable and delightful: if it were not so they would have painted their charm-


ing old houses green, or committed some other such indecency. No; I am sure that the evils of suburban society are qualified, negatively and positively, as much as those of other places, and I can find no explanation of my puzzle in them.

I can find no explanation at all, and if it suits your circumstances and your ideas of comfort to live in a suburb, I beg you will not be deterred by any unpleasant use of the word. I can easily understand your inclination. Perhaps when England is one big town it may become natural for human bodies to breathe soot. At present it is natural to seek air comparatively fresh, a garden in which one can sit, and so forth. It is rather a weak compromise to go so far only as a suburb and to return to the sooty town every day, instead of giving up city employment and herding sheep on some breezy plain, and there must needs be a loss of the true London spirit. But we live in a material age, and the health of wives and children and such considerations influence us all. So get you your little red-brick villa and be suburban and unashamed.

It is not for me to express the suburbs in their quiddity. When they are mean and

squalid, why then they are mean and squalid: as I have suggested, there is little philosophically to differentiate their squalor from the squalor of other English places. And the same remark applies to their social life: it is sometimes mean, it may be sometimes pleasant, but it contains no points of difference for the philosopher from social life elsewhere. Such differences as there are, in the one or the other case, are for the observer of details, the engaging person who records minute differences of ugliness in speech and manners and appearance for those who like such photographs. But a feeling one has had in the prettier suburbs may not be amiss to indicate here. When one sees something beautiful in a suburb,—a house, an old common, a park,—the beauty has in it something wistful and pathetic which such beauty in the country happily lacks. One feels the nearness of the monster town with its blindly groping hands—like some Polyphemus searching for the fearful Greek in the *Æneid*. One's enjoyment is anxious, for one has to trust to boards and societies and such things for its continuance. In spite of them the beautiful things are going. A spasmodic effort (as lately) may stop some glaring outrage, but

the lesser outrages go on unchecked. There are spots in Richmond Park where one might be in any beautiful park in the country, and one may muse there on romance and dead centuries. But London is creeping round, and on Saturdays the park is alive with defiant bells and perspiring hordes hurrying back to restaurants and theatres. London is near, and the beauty of Roehampton Gate as you come down the hill at sunset has a pathos I would not express if I could. Yet it might soften the contemptuous commentator on the suburbs. But I went there the other day and found the beauty gone—destroyed by a horrible red house which is being built inside the Gate. O my country!



## IX. COCKNEY HUMOUR

So far I have dealt with places. I must allow myself one less concrete subject, and end my unworthy appreciation of the town I live in by doing it, if I may, one slight service.

A gross injustice is done to London in the conceptions which most people hold of Cockney humour. Any vulgar joke you please is referred to this source, any writer of professedly funny books who happens to be without taste and education is called a Cockney humorist. This is very stupid, for Cockney humour, whether excellent in its average or not, is certainly distinctive, and it has nothing to do with vulgarity as such, nothing with the feebly forced jocosity of the writers to whom I have referred.

This jocosity, indeed, falsely and inconveniently called Cockney, may be usefully observed for a moment by way of contrast to the true Cockney humour. I trust that you will understand the sort of jocosity in

books and journals to which I refer: I am too cowardly to name the books or the writers. It can lay no claim to being Cockney; it is not local in its nature, its producers are not necessarily Londoners; and its appreciators are the possessors of slow wits and vulgar tastes all over the country. Its local adjective is therefore misleading and unjust, and is to be from this moment abandoned. Conventional jocosity, like conventional sentimentalism, comes of fatness and idleness. It is essentially a quality of the comfortable classes, an excrescence of excessive materialism and want of mental exercise. It supplies the occasions of those whose minds move slowly and will not be stirred, but whose idle sides crave to be shaken. It is conventional therefore, and deals in stock and largely labelled figures, such as mothers-in-law and 'swells' with eyeglasses. It is always behind the times in the manners it depicts, for its patrons have been fed on a long tradition of it and must not be expected to use their eyes. It tends to an unthinking and unmanly brutality, gibing at old maids and women who have lost their looks—a brutality to which one notes with sorrow that one of

the few real humorists of our times has committed himself. Its assumptions are all the old middle class ideas, the unquestioning acceptance of wealth as superiority, the contempt of art, and so forth. I do not wish to indict everybody who is amused by it, for we all must laugh, and good causes of laughter are not always known and accessible. But it is essentially the amusement of stupid, clumsy, and unexercised minds. I protest with all the little vigour I have that its confusion with Cockney humour is abominable.


By Cockney humour I mean roughly the humour of London streets and public-houses. This I take to be distinctive: it is not understood in its fulness outside London, even by those of the same class and habits as the Londoners who produce and relish it. By 'produce' I mean invent and shout from the box-seat of an omnibus or from the press round the bar, for it seldom if ever finds its way into print. These Londoners live lives that are tolerably strenuous, always precarious, and often necessitous. Their minds do not run to fatness. Sentimentalism appeals to them only as following on beer or gin in a play-house gallery, and is not



then of a pernicious type; their sorrows are mostly connected with police-courts. They are the lower classes of London, and if they are not, as it has been somewhat dubiously said of the middle classes, the back-bone of the country, I claim for them at least that their wits, such as they may be, are in tolerably active exercise. Their humour is not conventional; it is fresh, and it lives. I do not mean that it is always first-rate—it is generally, no doubt, pretty poor in quality; but it is humour, and suits the moment: it is not a stereotyped and conventional pretence of it. It is coarse, to be sure, if you object to that. A vice of false refinement is to mistake coarseness for vulgarity, and to be offended by certain substantives and adjectives. If that is your unfortunate case, you cannot enjoy real Cockney humour. In fact, I am afraid that to savour it rightly you must be not only not prudish, but familiar enough with certain words of coarseness not to be surprised or preoccupied by them; you must remember that these words are in constant use by the folk you are observing, and must not overrate their force or importance. To omit the words is to miss the atmosphere. In some of Mr. Kipling's

soldier ballads it is necessary, for a right effect, to replace certain words for which he gives you tokens. They are quite harmless to the intelligent and genuinely refined. So in a Cockney story one must keep to its natural diction.

The most remarkable characteristic of Cockney humour is that it is absolutely unscrupulous. It has no reservations. Everything which comes within its horizon is a subject, an occasion, for jest. Now that—like it or dislike it—is a distinction. You do not find it in modern literature. And I am reminded that Cockney humour hardly comes into literature at all. The spirit of good Dr. Bowdler has kept it out. Dickens, who might have used it, refrained, for if you mention Sam Weller I reply that he had next to no humour at all—adding breathlessly, to keep my head from Dickens' worshippers, that Sam Weller was a wit. He had wit, certainly, and gave us a store of witticisms, but he had not humour. Also, Sam was not distinctively Cockney: his pronunciation, of the Borough it may have been, and as it exists in parts of contemporary Essex, was hardly Cockney at all. I have sometimes met with a fragment of Cockney



humour in the *Sporting Times*—a departed contributor of that paper observed or invented it with genius. But with that exception I have not seen it reported. There follows in the distinguished absence of scruple the quality of brutality. But it is a different thing from the mean and conventional brutality I was reviling lately. It does not laugh at old women as a matter of course. It consists merely in ignoring the horrible or tragic side of a funny situation. Everybody knows the old story of the Cockney laughing after a fire. “Jump, yer silly fool,” I says; “me and my mite’s got a blanket!” An’ e did jump, and there warn’t no blanket, and ’e broke ’is — neck. Laugh? I ’aven’t laughed so much,’ etc. A thousand apologies if the old story jars on your refinement. But I maintain that the contrast of expectation and the event is really humorous, and the brutality which can laugh is surely innocent. One finds such a brutality in Rochester, who was a sort of aristocratic blackguard Cockney of genius.

Cockney humour is always ready, and in a generation which is said to lack amusing talkers its repartee should be cherished. As a rule they are not exactly witty, they are

too bald in form for that, but they embody roughly a humorous grasp of situations. I will not give you instances, disliking to shirk the faithful record of my memory, and being afraid you may think me very vulgar as it is. To find them you must go your ways among cabmen in their shelters, and omnibus men, and flower-girls, and other people. Cockney humour seems to have almost disappeared from the music halls; the last inspired exponent of it I remember was Bessie Bellwood. One meets it, of course, among people who are not Cockney nor lower class. The thoroughly dissipated young rake who has a humorous turn is much akin in his freer talk to the true Cockney humorist. One wonders if the quality will ever make a masterpiece of a book. Serious, long-faced realism is allowed a fairly free hand: one wonders if realism will ever be allowed to laugh, and humours of unscrupulous thoughts and unshackled tongues to come to their own again in our literature, as they partly came two centuries ago. Probably not.



II  
BOOKS AND MEN



## BYRON—TO 1816<sup>1</sup>

THE first three volumes of Byron's *Letters and Journals*, which Mr. Rowland Prothero is editing and Mr. John Murray is publishing, take their readers to the end of the year 1816, and so include the brief period of his lionising in London, the lamentable business of his marriage, his separation from his wife, his persecution (for it amounted to that), and his virtual and virtuous expulsion from his country. A point has been reached, therefore, at which one may examine comparatively the edition so far as it has gone—its merits, which are certain; and its demerits, such as they may be. And having done so, one may be permitted further to state an

<sup>1</sup> I had it in mind to fuse these two essays, but found on the whole that the balance of advantages was in favour of asking the reader's patience for an apparently unnecessary division. The edition they 'review' is itself, substantively, worth his attention, and my criticism of it is more intelligible in the two halves than it would be in one whole. I think, moreover, that the subject of Byron, as a man, is difficult enough to excuse an appearance of repetition for the sake of clearness.—G. S. S.



opinion or two, confirmed by certain fresh evidences in these three books, of one of the most remarkable Englishmen, putting him at his lowest, that ever lived, and of one of the strangest events in our social history.

Mention, but the briefest mention only, must be made of the fact that circumstances and accidents have prevented the placing of Mr. Murray's mass of fresh material in the hands of the poet and critic whose gifts, knowledge, and distinction alike marked him patently as the writer best fitted to deal with it. It is a fact to which Mr. Prothero himself has gracefully and generously alluded, and on which Mr. Henley would not thank me for insisting. But it is too great a pity, too great a loss to the interest of contemporary letters, for one to do less than express regret. With this exception, however, it would be difficult to think of an editor who would have been likely to do the work more effectively than Mr. Prothero. He is painstaking to an admirable degree; his names and dates and quotations are noted all with scholarly exactitude. In the matter of quotations, indeed, I am tempted to think him a trifle over-lavish of his care. Byron had a memory wonderfully quick and

tenacious, but not verbally accurate: he quotes freely in his letters, and often makes a mistake, whereupon Mr. Prothero inevitably puts him right—which is very well, but a little distracting to one's attention, as also are the equally well-justified and inevitable references to acts and scenes in Shakespeare and so forth. But this is the ungracious grumble of the surfeited. Mr. Prothero's other conspicuous excellence is clearness of statement; his facts are unambiguously given, and when he gives an opinion (of which he is properly sparing) there is no doubt of it. Throughout, however, he has subordinated himself to his task, taking, it would seem, his part to be strictly that of an editor, not of a biographer. It would seem as though he had deliberately purposed not to supersede Thomas Moore in his part of commentator. As a consequence, partly, of this attitude, while the edition, so far as the actual letters and journals are concerned, takes the place of Moore's, by reason of fresh material, fulness, accuracy, Moore's own part of the work is not superseded: it is still necessary for an amateur of the subject to read the *Life*.

This I take to be by no means a demerit.

We think nowadays that Tom Moore was overrated in his, but at least he was a considerable personage, more than representative of the best opinion current in English society, and one of Byron's two or three most intimate friends to boot. His *Life* is more than worth reading for its own sake. Mr. Prothero has perforce made several excerpts from it, but I fancy—one fancies inevitably—that he has left several significant passages out. For example, there is the little anecdote of Byron's early boyhood in Aberdeen, an anecdote which illustrates a persistent characteristic and is curious for the Scotch dialect, which is tolerably foreign to our ideas of the later Byron: I mean the flash of temper and the 'dinna speak of it!' to the lady who noticed his lameness. This is to be minute, but in personal studies one is minute or nothing. There is Moore's story of the lobster and the brandy, which is not given in the notes to the letter referring to it. There are Byron's criticisms of his own *English Bards*, etc., written on a copy of the poem in 1818; and there are Byron's notes on Isaac Disraeli's *Literary Character*—'When a boy I could never bear to read any poetry whatever without disgust and reluctance.'

Byron's saying 'Miss Milbanke, shall we go?' when his bride and he were setting out on their honeymoon, was significant enough—if only for his absence of mind on the occasion, elsewhere recorded—to be recalled. These are examples of slight omissions (within the period) which one reader might regret and another not; but they help to bear out my contention that Moore's Life must still be read.

A more obvious omission,<sup>1</sup> and one which I quite fail to understand, is that Mr. Prothero never marks his fresh material, whether letters or passages in letters, as such. This is not perhaps important to the general reader, but is so obviously inconvenient to any one who wishes to compare editions, or who, having read the old, wishes to read only what is new, and it has saved such a very small amount of labour that one is perplexed by it. It is possible to guess roughly and in a roundabout way from what we are told of collation with the original MSS. that certain batches of letters are newly published, and of course it is possible to collate the edition

<sup>1</sup> As it will be seen, the omission was ultimately supplied. But I let the objection stand, as an humble admonition to editors of gradually published works.

letter by letter ; but this tedious and mechanical task might have been so easily obviated. . . . Any other objection ? None, I think, unless it be that the design on the cover is not beautiful, the coronets with which it is peppered reminding one of an unimportant and amusing but none the less rather petty foible of the poet, who was called 'the old English baron' at Dr. Glennie's school, and was known at Harrow to speak of a 'brother peer,' and probably to be kicked therefor. After all, however, it is possible to have one's copy rebound.

The merits of the edition are progressive. The new material for the early years is large, but not very remarkable. It grows in interest with the *Hours of Idleness* and *English Bards* period, at which Moore began to suppress names and delete passages as offensive to people alive at the time, which Mr. Prothero has restored. With the third volume, which begins when Byron returned from his travels in the East, the fresh matter grows rapidly in importance, and is especially valuable for the light on Byron's connections with his charming friends, Lady Caroline Lamb, Lady Oxford, and Lady Frances Webster. It is too late in the day to profess to regret this

light. Nobody detests and abhors more than I the unnecessary publication of private matters: there have been instances of it which I do not hesitate, especially since I need not name them, to call disgusting. But Byron's loves and quarrels, completely interesting as they are for the psychology of passion and intrigue and clash of characters and for the social history of the period, were public property (used as public property is wont to be used) eighty years ago, and his charming friends might be great-grandmothers: the most fastidious of us need not blush to be curious about them. Finally (for this third volume) there is a correspondence anent the famous separation, not all of it newly published, it is true, but conveniently collected from various sources, which makes the nature of that transaction and of its unhappy consequences for Byron plain to the most mystery-loving of theorists. It will be in future volumes, however, that the advantages of this edition over its predecessors will be most apparent, for, as Mr. Prothero has pointed out, the bulk of Byron's correspondence from 1816 onwards was with John Murray, whom he used as a convenient medium for communication with men of letters and with his

men friends generally in England: a large part of this correspondence has not been published, and much of what has been published was very freely edited by Moore; consequently, from this point onwards, one will look for fresh matter greater in quantity and (since Byron had reached that period of his life most fruitful intellectually and least distracted by mere worries and unlucky accidents) better in quality as well; possibly also one may write about it. And so much for any general or formal comparison of editions: one may pass to a more particular consideration of the conclusions to be drawn (more firmly than before) from the last—that is to say, to some estimate of Byron and his fortunes as he and they were up to the year 1816.

Without apology, for it is useless to deny that Byron is still an open question. Many of us have made up our minds about his place as a poet and his qualities as a man, but we can always find somebody—not necessarily an unintelligent body—to take the opposite view. It is not to the purpose of this essay to argue about his poetry. The extraordinary enthusiasm for his earlier poetry was largely a question of the needs of a given genera-

tion; it was not until *Don Juan* that he wrote for all time—until *Don Juan*, which for sheer strength of intellect, expressed in humour, or irony, or idea, for variousness of humanity, and here and there for beauty of phrase and feeling, I take to be one of the very greatest of the written achievements of our race. For the poetry up to 1816, bating parts of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*, the first half-dozen stanzas or so of *Parisina*, and certain songs, I am willing to give some ground to its assailants. There is, however, an order of adverse criticism of it for which I am glad to express my contempt. In so far as the contemporary ideal of style is for simplicity and directness, I think it a better ideal than that of Byron's day. His own letters are as good an example of direct simplicity as you may find anywhere: his earlier poems are not so. That is a pity, I admit: I admit that the convention of phrasing for poetry current in his time was a bad convention. On this subject no greater a person than Leigh Hunt gave Byron some very sound advice, for which I can forgive the 'puppy-dog' a good deal of his trivially abominable treatment of Byron's memory. The passage is worth transcribing: 'The



plain matter is this: it appears to me that we often hurt the effect, in modern poetry, of very true feelings and descriptions by putting them in false language; that is to say, we accommodate ourselves to certain habitual sophisticated phrases of *written* language, and thus take away from real feeling of any sort the only language it *ever actually uses*, which is the *spoken* language.' That is a truth we have happily come to recognise, and sometimes even to remember in practice: in Byron's time it was little understood. But because he was largely a victim of this 'habitual sophisticated' diction, certain critics are blind to the abundant evidence, internal and external, that his poetry was passionately individual and felt; that it was produced, as we know now, invariably as a result of some emotional disturbance of his own—and blandly condemn it as 'insincere.' This is the criticism of critics who never grow up,—whose vision, in depth and breadth, is always that of the sixth-form boy. I am glad to say an unkind word for them; but, as I stated, it is not my purpose to argue about Byron's poetry.

Of his character as a man there will be always, of course, two opinions. Some of us

admire a great mind and a generous heart; others admire a reticent manner, freedom from scandal, and the capacity of living within one's income. These two sets of qualities are sometimes joined—heaven forbid that I should deny it!—but when they are not there will always be people who regard the absence of the latter rare set as more than counterbalancing the presence of the former: such people will always dislike the memory of Byron, and they must be left to their respectable, if not irresistibly attractive, point of view. But there are certain popular misconceptions of Byron on which it seems a commonplace to dwell, since the first publication of his letters should have dismissed them for ever, but which one may notice in a word. The idea of him as a saturnine, 'affected,' glowering being, disdainful of ordinary life and plunged in melancholy and conceit, the idea which resulted in so many absurdities on the part of imitative idiots, is dissipated by the merest glance at his letters or the testimony of his friends. He was a lively and witty companion: Moore notes in his Diary this fact of him when he saw him in Venice after three years' absence from England, and when he

had cause enough for melancholy in the revival of memories such a meeting would excite. He was full of humour, enjoyed a joke and even a romp: who that has read it can forget that scene when he tried to read Thurlow's poem to Moore and Rogers and could not proceed for laughing? As for conceit, a man of Byron's powers who professed a mean opinion of them would be an impostor; but he never resented criticism from a friendly quarter, and would admit, even unreasonably, that another man had done better than he—*e.g.*, his letter to Murray of April 26, 1814: 'After reading it' (a poem called *Bonaparte* by Stratford Canning) 'I really regret having written my own. I say that very sincerely, albeit unused to think humbly of myself.' He was keenly interested in his friends' affairs, and enthusiastic about their achievements. That he was bitter from time to time was inevitable. He had been brought up in exaggerated views of his importance, and especially of the importance of that unfortunate title of his, and when he went into the world after leaving Cambridge he found himself without a friend, except for a few college cronies, and with no resort but the places of vulgar dissipation. Then, as

now, a mere title was no sufficient passport to the best of London society, and Byron's only connections of any social standing were the family of his guardian, Lord Carlisle, with whom he had quarrelled. Followed later his brief career as a hero of society, and then the crisis which drove him from his country, and in which, if ever a man had cause to rail at the malevolence and stupidity of his fellow-creatures, he was that man. He was only twenty-eight when it happened: no wonder he was bitter.

But this bitterness yielded always to the least approach of kindness and friendliness. And Byron's great capacity for friendship and the warmth of his affections may well detain you for a while, since they are illustrated again and again, in ways most touching to follow, in the new letters. His devotion to his sister, though as a boy he hardly ever saw her, is shown in many affectionate letters, and as one reads them one thinks with nausea of the hideous story which his wife (whose own letters are sufficient refutation of it, if a refutation were needed) devised in her, let us hope, crazy old age, and which the egregious Mrs. Stowe and many respectable people and periodicals

disgraced themselves by believing or pretending to believe. His boyish affection for his Harrow friends, whose letters he kept to the end of his life, and for his Cambridge friends; his continued kindness to his lawyer's family, with whom he had stayed as a boy; his care for innumerable dependants—*e.g.*, the old woman who followed him in all his changes of address until he left England; his enthusiasm for Tom Moore; above all, perhaps, since money is unfortunately a real though a vulgar touchstone of friendship, his unbounded and delicate generosity,—all this is clear proof of a royal and warm heart, and is very touching to observe.

I say touching, for it is quite evident that Byron's friendship was very ill requited. His best friend was Hobhouse, who defended him boldly in the worst of his crises, who did not scruple to tell him his faults, and who was the only one of his old friends who saw much of him when he left the country: Hobhouse, who was always ready to speak with his enemies in the gate, with his wife, for example, and her terrible mother, or to support him by his presence (he saw him off from England, you remember, with Scrope Davies, the Regency Buck, who came to a

bad end, and deserved a better)—Hobhouse stands out as the one absolutely disinterested and constant friend. (I speak, you remember, of the period to 1816.) I do not mean that the others were not disinterested because Byron was of service to them, but with Hobhouse there cannot be even a shadow of doubt: he had nothing to gain from Byron, and he braved social and political drawbacks on his account. The Rev. Mr. Hodgson, whose marriage was made possible by Byron's gift of £1000, wrote feeling letters, and shed a manly tear over his misfortunes. His sister, of course, did not fail him, though she was a little too much of a peacemaker at the time of his separation. Hanson his lawyer, and Murray his publisher—of course they remained on terms with him. Who else was there? There was Fletcher, his valet. . . . Most of Byron's friends seemed to have taken his hospitality and his money, and gone away to criticise his eccentricities. It is a little significant that before he left England Byron, who had given large sums of money to several personal friends, and had supported poor authors, so to speak, all over the country, had to sell his library for £1500.

I have not forgotten Tom Moore; but his case is complex, and requires a paragraph to itself. Byron counted Moore and Hobhouse as his two most intimate friends. Moore stood before the world as his friend *par excellence*, his literary executor, and so forth. He was unfortunately out of town when the town turned on Byron and rent him. His *Life* is full of appreciation, and no doubt he only did his duty in pointing out Byron's faults. But have you ever read Moore's *Diary*? It is in eight volumes, I grant you, but it is worth reading as the revelation of a kindly, plucky, intelligent, independent little soul, and, moreover, as a mine of stories, many of which will bear quoting anywhere. The revelation is intimate, so intimate that I sometimes wonder why our essayists do not mention it when they are writing about Pepys. (For example, when he hears of Walter Scott's misfortunes, the diarist regrets that he knew him so well, for otherwise he had been spared the pain of sympathy—surely an unusually frank touch.) Well, I find no great affection for Byron in this *Diary*, and I cannot help thinking it a better guide to his feelings than his *Life of Byron*, where every consideration induced him to

display his affection and admiration at their highest. Moore, I fancy, was one of those men who keep their real affections strictly for those near to them. He was devoted to his family: he was an excellent son, husband, and father. But his friends in the world with whom he dined and stayed in the country, leaving his dear Bessy at home as a rule, these friends he regarded somewhat coldly and critically, and among them I think he placed his 'noble friend' Byron. He is critical of the letters he receives or is shown; he shows little gratitude for their affection for himself. At the very moment when Byron gave him the Memoirs to do what he liked with them, he notes that Byron is growing careful about money and hoards sequins in a box. He admired Byron sincerely, I do not doubt: the evidences of his chagrin when people failed to place himself on Byron's level are natural when we remember that audiences in the Edinburgh and Dublin theatres cheered Tom Moore when he went to the play. But I can find no evidence that he returned the intimate personal liking and affection which Byron had for him. When he heard of Byron's death, his first thought was the destination



of the Memoirs. As for the destruction of those Memoirs, I do not think we should blame Tom Moore very severely. He lost money by it at the time, and everybody—Mrs. Leigh and Hobhouse included—advised their destruction. It was a thousand pities: it did not seem to occur to Moore and his advisers that there was a mean between publication and destruction. So far as one can gather, moreover, from Lord John Russell and others who read them, there was nothing worse than ‘coarseness’ to be alleged against them. A thousand pities: but I am sure that Moore thought he was doing the best for Byron’s posthumous interests. Only, once more, he never returned Byron’s friendship in full measure. But Byron was content with him, it seems, and so no harm was done.

In the case of men whom he simply met in the world on a basis of mutual interests and tastes, he had nothing for complaint before 1816, and the best of them—Rogers, for example, and Walter Scott—stood by him, more or less, at that time. Men whom he knew more strictly as men of letters, as Gifford and Jeffrey (whom he never met in the flesh), were not frightened into renounc-

ing him. But all this was not enough for Byron: his temperament needed a return of his warm affection, and that, save in very few instances, he never had. There is a curious proof that he himself was sincere in this matter. When the Duke of Dorset, who had been one of his boyhood's closest friends, was killed in the hunting-field in 1815, Byron confessed that he did not care. They had met only once in ten years, and 'it would be a paltry affectation to pretend that I had any feeling for him worth the name.' (It was then that he wrote that sad and true poem, 'There's not a joy the world can give,' etc.) Such a confession would not be made by a trifler in friendship.

It is this side of Byron's nature which is best shown in the letters up to 1816. Other qualities there are in abundance—keenness for life; humour, sometimes gay, sometimes biting; whimsical flashes of temper—'the devil never created or perverted such a fiend as the fool of a printer'; cynicism, occasionally cheap, no doubt; love of beautiful things most patently real. These qualities are confirmed afresh by the new letters, but they were well known of him before by all who preferred seeing the man

himself to trusting popular conceptions of him.

We come to the crash of 1816, which the letters now printed or conveniently arranged in this edition make more than ever, what I have called it, one of the strangest events in our social history. I do not mean the actual separation from his wife. That I take to be very little mysterious. Miss Milbanke had been the idol of a little set, a prodigy of cultivation and goodness and so forth. She expected to be revered as a superior being, and to continue in an attitude of tender pity for her husband's imperfections. As a lover—full of enthusiasm for a pure woman and weary of intrigue and the tempers of women less pure than pleasant—Byron used towards her, as his letters before marriage, now printed for the first time, show, as much deference as she could desire. But the *rôle* of self-complacent angel in their wives is not commonly agreeable to husbands, and no doubt Byron found the cold superiority of the spoilt paragon a thousand times worse than the tantrums of Lady Caroline Lamb. He was otherwise in an irritable frame of mind, living in an atmosphere of bailiffs and writs—an atmo-

sphere which amuses comfortable people at a distance, but is apt to get on the nerves of those who actually experience it. And she, no doubt, experienced the irritation not uncommonly felt by perky little cleverness in the presence of a wider and deeper intellect. The sort of spirit, too, in which she regarded her husband and what was dear to him is significantly disclosed in her description of Mrs. Musters (Mary Chaworth), the romantic and innocent love of his youth, as a 'wicked-looking cat.' Byron had his reputation, and though at this time he seems to have been 'faithful' to his wife—for the Clairmont episode is proved to have been subsequent to the separation—his wife, with all her virtues and mathematics, was jealous. He came, we may suppose, to deriding her perfections, and she, in a fury of outraged vanity, rushed to the conclusion (honestly, I do not doubt) that such a transgression could be explained only by madness. The doctors said he was not mad, and her vanity had no resource but to hit out. She was a cold-blooded woman, and vanity proved stronger than physical ties. She held Byron to his promise, incautiously given, of a separation when she should wish for it;

she refused to go into court or make any definite charge against him—though she told some story to her legal adviser, under a pledge of secrecy, to make him desist from attempts at reconciliation. Rather than expose the petty nature of her quarrel, she preferred to ruin her husband's reputation by her silence, and of course justified herself with ease. 'I think it a great error to regard "worldly disgrace" as a serious evil compared to some that must ensue, with his character, from worldly prosperity. . . . Not that I would *voluntarily* be the means of chastisement,' etc.: so she wrote, and so she wrote herself down an example of selfish canting cruelty for all time. And so much for Lady Byron, on whom one's fancy cannot linger with much pleasure.

It is not the separation, but the consequent conduct of the country—the word is not too large—which astonishes and perplexes me. For it is neither an unjust nor a cowardly country, and on this occasion its conduct was a miracle of cowardly injustice. Here was a famous poet, a young man of twenty-eight, an idol of society, of whom the worst that was known was that before his marriage he had had certain connections

with tolerably well-known women in his set—connections to be regretted, but not unusual in such a set then, or now; the country heard that he had separated from his wife, an occurrence of every day; immediately such a storm was raised against him in society and the newspapers that his acquaintances were afraid to know him, and his friends required courage (which Lady Jersey, almost alone of them, had) to invite him to their houses, that he was advised not to appear in public, to go to the House of Lords or the play (advice on which he did not act), and that at last his friends and he had to confess that it was idle to protest, and that England was impossible for him: he left it a veritable exile. Even then the rancour followed him; people expressed indignation at the mere idea of his return (though not, of course, abstaining from intrusion on his privacy when they went abroad), silly calumnies of all kinds about him were sent home—he was a cockshy for universal slander and hatred.

Such is the bare fact, which we have to try to understand. A few aids to understanding of course exist. Without doubt there had been a great deal of latent hostility to Byron

personally. He was not generally popular with men. We know that he was frank and modest in conversation, but we know also that such an intellect as his could not endure empty chatter for ever, and sought solitude, and that such a quick and passionate temperament was not likely to suffer fools gladly. Now, in general society the average man is commonly a bit of a fool. Again, a sense that he had been unfairly treated rankled in him even in the time of his London vogue, and though he was modest he could be haughty with men, and that without the stolidity which was then, as now, largely the national ideal of good-breeding. Again, he was known to have extraordinary success in attracting women. Again, his long periods of abstinence, his biscuits and soda-water, must have annoyed the Englishman of that period severely, though he atoned for it on occasion with his three bottles—‘a fair holiday drinker,’ Scrope Davies called him. For more serious causes of unpopularity, there were many people who were honestly offended by his poetry, some perhaps who were honestly scandalised by the reports of his early dissipation, which he, in un-

happy bravado, had countenanced, and there were many more who hated his politics: he had praised Napoleon and offended the Regent, that miracle of chastity, and his Court.

Now if Byron had been convicted of some crime, it would have been natural that all this dislike and jealousy and disapproval should have come to a head and sent up a prolonged howl: that is the way of the world. But the point is that not only was he not so convicted, but that no definite charge was ever brought against him. I confess I used to think that there must have been such a charge; that it was known that he was afraid to face an accusation of something generally abhorrent, which, if true, would have justified his ostracism. But it was clearly not so. Between the times of his separation and his leaving the country, he and his friends did their utmost to trace a definite accusation to some man who could be called out. Hobhouse, on his behalf, insisted to the last with Lady Byron's advisers that Byron was prepared to meet any charge publicly in a court of law. There was no question of his shirking inquiry; he demanded it, and bitterly complained that it



was not given him. It seems as though the whole country had entered into a conspiracy, none the less vile because it was but half conscious—a conspiracy of cowardly innuendo and silence under question.

Speaking roughly, I take it to have been the case that the waxing conscience of the nation had grown impatient of notorious immorality in high places, and that Byron was a scapegoat. The hue and cry well started, some joined in it from private malignity, others from the mere contagion of a craze. It is a very poor explanation, and it leaves a stain of social injustice on the country. Happily the injustice was impotent to crush its victim, and happily we can afford to admit it, for it is unique in our social history.

So we leave Byron in 1816, in the twenty-ninth year of his age, a man of many small faults and many commanding virtues; a mass of contradictions, as are most men whom force of intellect and temperament throws into relief; reckless and shrewd; tempestuous and placable; modest in regard to his intellect, vain of his good looks; an unselfish egotist; fickle in his realised passion, constant to an ideal. But the warmth

and generosity of his friendships have no contrast in his character.

After the year 1816, as his mind and his temperament deepened and broadened, his letters grow more and more pregnant with matter and delightful in expression: one will look for the new ones with interest both curious and profound.

## BYRON, 1816-1824

It was in 'Maga' of November 1899 that the first three volumes of Mr. Murray's new edition of Byron's *Letters and Journals* were discussed, and it was not until the middle of October 1901 that the sixth and last volume was published. The dates suggest, first of all, the great labour involved in the editing, and it is pleasant to offer Mr. Rowland Prothero a sincere compliment on its most successful completion. But they also suggest a certain weakness in this prevalent method of publishing a great work. To read a volume of Byron's letters is to desire the next at once. Life is complex, and the making of books is both endless and continuous: the reader cannot remain in the right atmosphere all the months of waiting, and although when they are over he may need to make but a slight effort to regain his attitude and interest, an ordinary memory at least will have let slip some minutiae it had been well to keep. Would

not a true lover of such good cheer have been content to go hungry till the feast was really ready? In this case there was an especial disadvantage in the delay. Of the very few objections made against Mr. Prothero on the former occasion, the most important was that, except in a very general way, he had not told us which was new material and which old. He was undisturbed by the criticism, and now appears his justification. At the end of vol. vi. is a table of the letters, giving their sources, and indicating which of them had been already published by Thomas Moore or Halleck—whose edition added seventy-four given to the world in the meantime by Dallas and Leigh Hunt, or used but not numbered by Moore. All's well that ends well; but the painful student sadly missed that table in reading volumes one to five. Probably there are important publishing reasons, beyond the understanding of a mere reader of books, why such a work cannot be given him all at once, but the humble plaint may be allowed to stand.

All that was said in praise of the first half of the edition may be said of the second: with greater force, indeed, since the op-

portunities for excellence were more. There are 500 new letters in the six volumes, there is other new material of great interest, and material old, but scattered and obscure, has been usefully collected. Examples of these merits will appear in the course of this essay, if I may be allowed as before to express my views about Byron, which this new edition has suggested or strengthened. Mr. Prothero's notes have continued to be models of completeness. He has considered—rightly, it is probable, though some people may find the result a little too abundant—the reader who needs to know every possible date, the source of every quotation, the precise act and scene in which even the most familiar of Shakespeare's sentences appear, and the whole history of every person mentioned or adumbrated in the text. What this means in the case of over a thousand letters, written nearly a hundred years ago by a man of Byron's variousness of interests, allusive habit, and immense reading, may be seen, but can hardly be imagined without seeing. Mr. Prothero gives a list of the authors quoted by Byron, and there are eight columns of them. And here is an instance of Mr. Prothero's care. Byron refers

(in vol. v.) to his wife as 'Vittoria Cărbăna the White Devil,' whereon Mr. Prothero gives you an account of Webster's play, *The White Devil*, quotes Charles Lamb's criticism of it, and relates the historical facts on which it was founded. Such a system of annotation, though it may give more than is strictly relevant, certainly adds a mass of instruction to the book. But with it all Mr. Prothero never confuses the reader, and never, as your voluminous commentator is too apt to do, shirks the really difficult points. He is to be complimented also in another regard. His asterisks are very few, Byron's plain speaking considered; he has not hesitated to print words supposed to be banished from 'polite society.' Any critic who complains of Byron's 'coarseness' should remember that Englishmen educated at public schools and universities generally use plain words in speaking to one another when the plain words express their sense, and are apt to look upon the periphrases of a certain kind of refinement as rather silly. But coarse or not, the thing is to have Byron as he wrote. For my part I regret such asterisks as there are, because Byron's letters are not for the schoolroom, and they give an undue

importance to the words omitted: besides, the words might have been interesting for the history of colloquial English. But the difficulties of an editor in this matter are obvious.

In writing of so complex an affair as the character of a man, to say nothing of a Byron, I think an essayist is ill-advised if he limit himself too strictly to divisions of periods and qualities. He may be clear in the particular, but is likely to be contradictory and dubious in the whole. In Byron as he was between 1816 and 1824 we may see three main periods—the Venice, the Guiccioli, the expedition to Greece—in which one side of him or another is the most apparent. But it is the same complex Byron in all three, and the reader will forgive me if, after touching on these periods, I go freely to and fro, taking those incidents in his life and those passages in his letters which seem to me most to help us in realising him. I will write very briefly of the Venice dissipation, because such periods in a great man's life are apt to be given a false importance. But I am writing of the man; and even in regard to the poet, it is much to the point in the case of one who wrote passionately of love, and cynically of women,

to know if he was a rake or a celibate. My opinion of Byron's life in this respect is that one time or another he may have been rather more dissolute than the average men of his class at the same ages, and that on the whole he was about the same as they were and are. It was the custom in his lifetime—echoed since—to talk of him as a libertine, as having 'exhausted every species of vice,' and so forth. It was to play with words and mistake them for things. How could a man who died at thirty-six and left behind him such a mass of written work—the quality even apart—as did Byron—to say nothing of his reading, and Mr. Prothero's eight columns of authors—be a libertine, steeped in vice and the rest of it? Or, if we consider the quality of his work, where are the signs of the weakening of intellect which such extravagance of vice as has been laid at Byron's door must produce? If one thing is certain about his work, it is that in width and grasp of intellect it waxed tenfold after he left England, and was strong to the end. But it is quite true that he dissipated in Venice. His letters about Marianna Segati and Margarita Cogni prove it. I am far from affirming that every young man under thirty



dissipates now and then; but I do affirm that of very many young men of Byron's antecedents and traditions. Only it is not talked about; if ever known, it is forgotten; whereas in Byron's case every jabbering traveller to Italy thirsted to hear and repeat anything to Byron's discredit; his friends moralised about it, his enemies howled over it, and he himself, alas! was only too ready to admit it. To the end of his days he could not break himself of the habit of stuffing the credulous with fables about himself, as Medwin's depositions remain to prove. Then consider the circumstances. He had been driven out of England, ostracised from most of the society of his class, on an absurdly inadequate pretext: was, in fact, in the condition of mind in which the facile consolations of *Mariannas* and *Margaritas*, to a warm-blooded young man with thwarted affections, are a most potent temptation. And he was living in a city where such a life as he led offended nobody: Madame Benzoni, a great lady in Venice, told Moore that before the Guiccioli affair, '*Il se conduisait si bien.*' I think we ought to discount Shelley's testimony on the subject. Shelley's native delicacy shrank from the animalism

of such commonplace intrigues as he found Byron engaged in; he seems especially to have been shocked by the lowness of Byron's society: whereas to Byron's broader humanity it was the 'pantaloon humour' of these low-class Venetians that was half their attraction.

I should like to leave this part of the subject, but that there is an admission to be made in honesty, without which any small value that may attach to my estimate of Byron would disappear. In Moore's Diary he mentions having seen in John Murray's famous 'parlour' a letter from Byron which disgusted him. He did not print it in his Life, and I hoped that there was some mistake. But it is printed now—it is letter 734—and it is not pleasant reading. It merely relates an 'affair,' but one of the kind a gentleman ought not to write about—whatever the *ethos* of his surroundings—even to an intimate friend. It is egotism of a bad sort. One is not an Old Bailey advocate for the defence, and one admits that here is an unworthy lapse even from the morality which may admit of palliation by circumstance. It is to be said, however, that Byron wrote it in a fever which followed a ducking

in the Grand Canal. It is also to be said that there is no evidence that Byron meant John Murray to show all his letters to any one he pleased. I do not doubt that Murray supposed he had such a licence, but years after this time (to be fair to Murray) Byron is found rebuking him for showing a letter without permission.

Madame Guiccioli took Byron out of this Venetian licence, and he never returned to it, in Venice or elsewhere. It is superfluous to discuss this connection. Whatever be thought of the morality of it, and whatever his or her excuses, which were held good by better people than most of the hostile critics, it is certain that they remained fond and faithful to one another. (According to Lord Malmesbury, her second husband, the Marquis de Boissy, introduced her as 'ancienne maîtresse de Lord Byron.') But the occasion is offered to venture a little deeper into the psychology of Byron's emotions. The more I read in his letters and in the accounts of those who knew him best, the more I am convinced that the popular idea of Byron as a man whose life was bound up in his love affairs, whatever their nature, is the very reverse of the truth: that, on the contrary,

his heart was very little concerned in them, and that his strongest emotions were his friendships with men whom he respected, whom he took for his intellectual peers. He seems to me to have longed to be understood, and liked, and affectionately regarded by his men friends with far more real feeling of the heart than is shown in any one of his affairs with women. He took women lightly, just a trifle in the Mohammedan way, and did not really care deeply about them in any other. No doubt he was chaffing when he said they ought not to eat with men: he said this sort of thing to annoy important ladies like Mrs. Shelley and Mrs. Hunt. And no doubt he exaggerated when he wrote in his diary—in 1821: it is not the least of Mr. Prothero's good deeds to have given these diaries and journals fully, as they were written—that the present state of women is 'a remnant of the barbarism of the chivalric and feudal ages—artificial and unnatural. They ought to mind home—and be well fed and clothed—but not mixed in society. . . . Music—drawing—dancing—also a little gardening and ploughing now and then.' But underneath the humour there is a sort of conviction. He wrote jestingly—and I do not think it was all

affectation—even of his affair with Madame Guiccioli. But there can be no doubt of his affection towards the men he really liked, of his eagerness to acknowledge the least kindness from any one of them, of his unstinted return of appreciation.

Much of what is called Byron's vanity I believe to have been this eagerness for the friendship of intellect and understanding. His pleasure when Walter Scott wrote to him, and his almost effusive replies; his hearty acknowledgment of Isaac Disraeli's appreciation; his delight in Goethe's—this is not vanity, but the best kind of human response, of mind leaping to mind. His patience under the criticism of those he liked is as notable as the vigour of his replies to that of his enemies. It is almost ludicrous to read of his allowing the first two cantos of *Don Juan* to be submitted to a committee of friends, who were to decide if they ought to be published. Of this surprising committee, two members, Moore and Frere, were poets, and of course in their own view rivals, and there were also Kinnaird, a banker, Hobhouse, a sincere but very candid friend, and Scrope Davies, a 'buck.' The committee decided that the cantos should

not be published, and Byron in the first instance positively acquiesced, with a shrug at the 'cant of the day' and a humorous complaint, quoting Tony Lumpkin, that he should be 'snubbed so while I am in spirits.' Not only about *Don Juan*, but about most of his other poems, Murray his publisher plied him with remonstrances and criticisms, and Byron met them all with careful argument and counter-appeal to be allowed to write his own poems. Even when Murray took upon himself to omit stanzas, dedications, and what not without leave, Byron, though exasperated, did no more than complain. He even writes to Moore: 'Murray has shuffled, and almost insinuated that my last productions are *dull*. Dull, sir!—damme, dull! I believe he is right.' There is not much vanity or arrogance in that. His relations with Murray are interesting, if only because the bulk of the letters, and especially of the new letters, were written to that personage. They have their comic side, and both poet and publisher made extraordinary demands on human patience. Byron seems to have looked on Murray as a sort of Whitely, a 'universal emporium.' I have noted down some of the things the unfortunate publisher

was required to send out to Italy: Tooth-powder, Peruvian bark, magnesia, Macassar oil, a bulldog, a terrier, two Newfoundland dogs, of course innumerable books, and 'Burkitt's soda powders.' The poet was difficult in the matter of proofs. 'None of your damned proofs; . . . don't let me have any of your cursed printers' trash to pore over,' he writes at one time, and at another is furious when printers' mistakes appear in his books. He sometimes patronises Murray with a sort of mock offensiveness, telling him that he is 'a little spoilt by "villainous company"—wits, persons of honour about town, authors, and fashionables—together with your "I am just going to call at Carlton House: are you walking that way,"' and banters him on 'the ferine nature of a publisher': but it is clear that the mutual regard of the two men was never seriously interrupted. It was only when Byron's good nature was persuaded by Shelley to help the luckless enterprise of the brothers Leigh and John Hunt that even the business relation ceased—tried as it had been on both sides, by Murray's fears and Byron's irritations.

Byron had to complain, and justly, as Moore admitted in his Diary too late, of

neglect from old friends—‘thinking constantly, as his letters prove him to have been, of distant friends, and receiving few or none equal proofs of thoughtfulness in return.’ He had to find, as others have found, how little active is the good nature we hopefully attribute to our acquaintance. But his own good nature was proof against that. With Moore he never quarrelled at all, nor varied in his affectionate tone. There was a fresh—and an amusing—breeze with Hobhouse, but it was Hobhouse who took offence. When that ardent reformer was sent to Newgate for a brief period, Byron sent a funny ballad, in which it is hard to see more than friendly chaff, to Murray, from whom it leaked into the papers. Hobhouse was furious, not remembering his own lines on Byron, his parody of ‘Though the day of my Destiny’s over’—‘Dear Byron, this humbug give over,’ etc.—which are a good deal more severe. (It is a very funny and strictly verbal parody, of a sort we see too little of now: our parodist in chief, Mr. Seaman, parodies the spirit, a more difficult task, but the other sort is worth having as well.) It was later, however, that they quarrelled more angrily, the cause, which had something to do with a



bust, being obscure. Hobhouse wrote Byron an abusive letter, and Byron asked of Murray: 'By the way, you do not happen to know whether Mrs. Fry had commenced her reform of the prisoners at the time when Mr. Hobhouse was in Newgate? there are some of his phrases and much of his style (in that same letter), which led me to suspect that either she had not, or that he had profited less than the others by her instructions.' (I venture to quote, as it is part of the new material, but of course one could quote such delightful fun for ever from the letters.) But with Hobhouse, as with Kinnaird and a few others of his oldest friends, affection survived the trials of distance and consequent mistakes. One would give much to have more of his letters to Lord Clare. Madame Guiccioli describes Byron's emotion when he and Lord Clare parted in Italy, and in the last year of his life we find him still writing to this old Harrow chum as 'my dearest Clare.' Friends, cronies, confidants and sympathisers among men—that is what was really important to Byron's heart.

Of the men with whom he consorted after 1816 one thinks first of Shelley. It was an

intellectual friendship, based on a mutual admiration which—in spite of the phrase's evil meaning—was genuine and proper. Their tastes were not alike, and Shelley's sensitiveness sometimes was hurt by Byron's manner. But Byron wrote to Murray after Shelley's death, 'You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley, who was, without exception, the *best* and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison.' It is a tribute to rank with that of Gibbon to Henry Fielding, and it may be a finer.

It is not necessary to discuss the Leigh Hunt trouble. Hunt seems to have been one of those men born to justify cynics: he resented an obligation, though he made no effort to requite it; and that Byron should house and finance him and give, among other of his finest works, the *Vision of Judgment* to John Hunt's wretched paper, weighed nothing against fancied slights. The quarrel, such as it was, I suspect was a woman's affair. Byron disliked Hunt's *kraal*, as he rather rudely called it, and, especially, the 'six little blackguards,' Hunt's sons, and foolishly wrote this sentiment to Mrs. Shelley. That good lady, I am strongly of

opinion, would have shown at once such a letter to Mrs. Hunt. The opinion is not harsh, for Mrs. Shelley's generosity is revealed to us. Byron had refused Shelley's legacy to himself of £2000, had done all he could to get his widow an allowance from Sir Timothy Shelley, and had offered her money of his own, which she refused, preferring to accept Trelawney's. When Byron started for Greece (taking with him £10,000 to spend on the Greeks as a beginning) Mrs. Shelley inveighed against his 'unconquerable avarice' which 'prevented his supplying me with money,' and related how 'a remnant of shame caused him to avoid me.' Not, I think, the nicest sort of woman. As for Trelawney, he disliked Byron, and is not a trustworthy chronicler; moreover, his acquaintance with Byron was at a time when the poet's nerves, as many incidents show, were irritable. We know little of his Italian friendships, about which he would not be likely to write very much to his English correspondents. The Counts Gamba, the father and brother of Madame Guiccioli, were his constant allies, and Pietro Gamba seems to have been the most intimate of his foreign men friends. They seem rather to have 'let

him in' during the revolutionary movement at Ravenna—storing condemnatory arms in his house when the plot was discovered—but your patriot is often careless.

In labouring to be clear, I become long: I must quit this more exclusively personal aspect of Byron in Italy with a very few more words. The circumstances of his life were not likely to check the egotism obvious in him from the first, and the new letters, of course, are full of it. But it remained for the most part an egotism of the head and not of the heart—a harmless egotism which made him analyse himself in his diaries, and write accounts of the same trivial incident that had happened to him to half a dozen friends, and linger over his feats at swimming and recall his 'notches' at Lord's, but which never stood in the way of the sympathetic ear and the open hand. Without the egotism he could not have been the poet we admire, without the obverse side the Byron whose memory it is possible to love. Practical sense, judgment, observation, a grip of things—those qualities waver, as with all men, but grow steadily all the while. The humour becomes mellow, but remains as gay. A bitter gibe at his wife

from time to time we have, yet also a curious desire she should be kept in mind of him, and a real solicitude for his daughter, Ada. As for his old loves, he obliged my theory by hardly mentioning them: we find him trying to reconcile Lady Frances Webster and her husband at Leghorn with a friendly gravity.

This is not an occasion to write of the poetry, even if to do so would not be worse than superfluous. But questions of literary criticism fill a good space in the letters, especially in vol. v., and some of them are focussed by Mr. Prothero in his appendices. Passages in the new letters, in vol. v., which depreciate Keats have caused a good deal of not unnatural annoyance to present-day critics. Now, if Byron's abuse of Keats—for I fear it amounts to that—had been a cold-blooded and accurate expression of opinion, it would reflect without doubt on Byron's taste and judgment. But the reverse is the case. In that day literary 'schools' and parties were furiously fighting bodies. Keats, in the eye of the world, belonged to the school of Wordsworth and Coleridge—a school which offended Byron by its really excessive claims to be the only prophet of

'nature,' and by an equally excessive and unreasonable belittling of Pope. The controversy between the classical and the romantic is dead: we are content to see the merits of both and enjoy what is best in them, but in the first quarter of the nineteenth century this reasonable course was almost impossible. Byron, also, would have been more than human if he had not been influenced by a very personal consideration. His own genius, stimulated by emotion though it was, grew, more strongly as years went on, intellectual, observant, epigrammatic, worldly, and it led him to forsake his first passionate manner and incline to the classical mode. He thought, and rightly, that his later work was far better than his earlier. But the later work was by no means so popular as the earlier. He wrote to Shelley in 1822: 'Murray writes discouragingly. . . . You see what it is to throw pearls to swine. As long as I wrote the exaggerated nonsense'—was ever poet so candid before or since?—'which has corrupted the public taste, they applauded to the very echo; and now that I have really composed, within these three or four years, some things which should

"not willingly be let die," the whole herd snort and grumble and return to wallow in their mire.' Pope was Byron's idol: he spared no pains to defend him, writing prodigious long attacks on the Rev. Mr. Bowles, and Keats was closely associated with his dispraise. It is, moreover, to the credit of Byron's judgment that he saw in Keats the strong man of the school he disliked—though of course, being a fighting critic, he did not say so—the man 'to go for,' and he went for him accordingly. As for the strength of his language, violence was the fashion of the time: the curious may see, in one of Mr. Prothero's appendices, remarks of Southey upon Byron as violent as anything Byron wrote against Keats or even Southey himself, and far—far—more venomous. When Keats died, Byron hastened to request Murray to 'omit *all* that is said *about him* in any MSS. of mine, or publication,' and added, 'His *Hyperion* is a fine monument, and will keep his name.' This was more generous dealing than Byron's critics meted to himself: the amiable Southey was moved to be 'sorry' for Byron's death, 'because it comes in aid of a pernicious reputation which was stinking in the snuff.' (It is worth

turning to this appendix to admire an exercise in malevolent, canting self-righteousness more remarkable than any of Southey's poems.) But even in our own impartial times, critics sometimes say things in their haste which their judgment might correct. I read the other day in a serious 'weekly' the expression of a wish that Mr. Kipling 'would give up writing altogether,' and the critic had just read *Kim*. If Byron was a little blind to the merits of Keats there was much excuse, and we are justified in thinking that he was not so blind as he seemed.

It was not a new Byron who sailed for Greece in 1823; it was not a quality hitherto dormant that suddenly took the lead of the rest. Dr. Drury at Harrow had thought he should be an orator and a statesman, and he had never been a sedentary poet, but of his nature, though not in results, essentially a man of action. For all that he wrote and read he had to thank his vitality of constitution: he could never live without mixing with men and lending his weight to their affairs, and had his strength not admitted of both it was action that would have come first. A happier start in public life at home and happier circumstances in his private life



might easily have lost the poet in the statesman. The countenance of English society, you must remember, was not given him until he had written a famous poem, and to start political life in the House of Lords poor and friendless was no likelier an opportunity then than now. And before he had run through the romantic and other pleasures which the brief worship of society threw in his path, before he had had fair time for such a temperament as his to set steadily for ambition, he was driven out of the country. This is perhaps a vain speculation, but at least action—adventure—the affairs of men, played as it was an invariably important part with him. First his travels, then tumultuous social action, so to call it, in England, then the dissipation and society of Venice, and then the revolutionary plots, into which he threw himself heart and soul at Ravenna. The spies of the Austrian Government, as their reports show, looked on Byron as a powerful conspirator—making all kinds of mistakes about him, as such gentry do, but obtaining plenty of corroboration for their fears. It is probable that the comparative calm of his last two years in Italy, only relieved by silly Hunt squabbles and the

like, had thoroughly bored him: his joy at escaping for an adventure is on record.

His motive in going can hardly have been merely enthusiasm for 'liberty.' The generous souls of that day had the privilege of believing that 'liberty' would really bring happiness to little nationalities, and Byron shared sincerely in this belief—which was at times a little strangely in contrast with his ultra-aristocratic habit of mind and contempt for the mob. But he could have had no illusions about the Greeks. He had seen them as a young man, when he thought them 'plausible rascals,' with the vices of the Turks without their virtues. Or, if he had any, he must have been quickly undeceived. One of his first actions at Missolonghi was to release several Mohammedan women and children whom the revolted Greeks had enslaved, after butchering the men; and from first to last almost every Greek who approached him tried to swindle him, or at least to make a private haul from the money he was ready to supply to the cause. 'Damned liars!' he wrote in a journal, and applauds St. Paul for seeing no difference between a Greek and a Jew. What sort of ambition he may have had for him-

self cannot be known. There were great chances in the game, for the quarrels of the Greek leaders were already making a foreign ruler indispensable. A large governorship at least he might have looked for, if not for something grander. But I fancy it was just the adventure that moved him most.

The upshot makes pitiable reading. Intrigues, worries, revolts, impossible leaders, impossible followers—illness, death. To the last he was indefatigable, keen, practical, and far-seeing. The might-have-beens crowd on one's imagination. If Byron had lived to the Psalmist's limit, he would have been alive in 1858. What would he have thought of Tennyson, of Dickens, of Thackeray? Of Disraeli, of Gladstone? These superficial questions give way to others less plausibly to be answered. But I cannot see that there was any radical twist in Byron's nature that was sure to bring an explosion, a madness, in the end. I cannot see why the strengthening of judgment, of the hold on practical life, of the curb on waywardness should not have continued. If he had returned from Greece he would have returned to England: that is certain. 'Why did I not go to England before I came here?' he said on his

deathbed. His old disgust of his countrymen had been waning, and was probably near its end in Cephalonia, where the good fellowship towards him of the English officers surprised and touched him. If he had returned to England the old 'literary' enemies and their war-cries would have been loud, of course, but they could not have stopped his course. With the fresh glamour of his Greek exploits on him another splendid chance would have been his, and this time it would not have been stolen from him. How would he have used it? His vigour as a poet was still at its greatest when he died, but there are signs that he was weary of the literary hubbub, and he was not one to write for writing's sake without regard to his effect. It was a time of great doings in politics, but not of very strong men, and such a force as Byron's must have weighed heavily then, if he had chosen. Vain dreams! —but I think that the loss of his intellectual honesty to English life was hardly less than that of his fire and his wit to English letters.



## AFTER READING HORACE WALPOLE

I DOUBT the impertinence of writing about Horace Walpole may not be forgiven. One may hardly hope profitably to sound those praises which have been told a thousand times by better men, and if one likes to discriminate in qualities, what signifies that discrimination to other whole-hearted lovers? But I am full of gratitude from a long re-reading of the letters, and one whose vocation is, or ought to be, to record himself one way or another in print, may fitly raise in gratitude his little heap of words out of sight of more imposing monuments—a scribbler so often has to write of things and books and people that have bored him to death. So I hope you will bear with me, and after all I shall be none the wiser if you don't.

I have read nothing but these letters for the last month; and if a phrase or two should slip from them along my pen, I hope you will not count it profanation or affectation—I can't help it, and the subject justifies them

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more than another. A strange thing, by the way, is an archaism. To these it is irresistible at the risk of sense or sincerity, to those it is as infuriating as though you had called them a bad name. I like to use one now and then, and would make it criminal in other people. Horace Walpole in his letters hardly uses one, preferring the sauce of cant phrases current with his intimates, which was odd in a man who loved the past so much and so belittled the present.

There is one of the qualities that warm his readers, for to read him at all presupposes sympathy with it. The dear past with its charming letters! It was an out-patient of Bedlam who first suggested that Mr. Walpole's were written with an eye on posterity, or else it was an envious generation that can write no better than it can talk, that has exchanged good letters for bald, as it has exchanged good manners for bluff rudeness, amusement for insipid dissipation, endeavour after excellence for the tricks of undeserved advertisement. Mr. Walpole despised posterity: he made a shrewd guess of the rascal it would be. And, by the way, he made the same charges against the generation that came in with his old age as I have

made against this; they are good honest charges to bring against any generation. But he did not write his charming letters for posterity. He wrote them because he had parts and was good-natured, and wished to amuse his friends. If we had his ability and good-nature we should write the like. He was idle and we are busy? Pray how many of our idle people—and we have a good number in the second generation from profitable trade, if our aristocrats are idle no longer—how many of them write good letters? The best I ever got were written by the busiest woman of my acquaintance—I have Horace's word that women write better letters than men—but she was not of this generation. Mr. Walpole complains that his letters are shown about; he writes often hurriedly in the intervals of society, often painfully, with gouty fingers. Besides, it is possible to be quite as busy in collecting pictures and curios, in writing books and printing others, and in obliging one's friends, as in cheating one's neighbours in the city or blackening innocence in a law court.

To talk of pessimism—the last touch of it was not very wise—have you ever observed that men who are good men in practice are

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often pessimists in theory, whereas your genial and vehement optimist is often a very dirty rogue? Mr. Walpole was good-natured, serviceable, generous, incorruptible, and yet his mistrust of his fellow-creatures' virtues was only equalled by his contempt of their abilities. While there is a man who seems to be convinced that the world is stocked full of courage and honour and generosity, who loses his self-control when anybody—in a book or play for example—suggests that it contains any quality but these, and whose life has been—a life I would not care to describe. The one man found that experience left him but very few people for friendship, but these he loved and they loved him; the other is boisterously fond of all the world, and would not give, nor be given, a sixpence to save a death in a ditch. I suggest no conclusion, but I know so many instances of these states, that unless I have proof of an optimist's virtue, I doubt he is a rascal.

In this I am not writing as a philosopher (but a philosopher, Horace Walpole said, was a supercilious brute); by pessimism I mean merely a rough opinion of one's fellows or one's age. Who shall say which is the better justified, Mr. Walpole's or mine? Politics I



suppose, remain much the same, with the motives of politicians. In his day self-interest was more crudely unabashed, and the distinction between money and other bribes—a distinction convenient to a richer period—was thought of less importance than now. In the art of letters I maintain the advantage was with Mr. Walpole, albeit his complaints of the minor vices of authors have ceased entirely to have ground. It is true that 'the mob of gentlemen who write with ease' is considerably greater in this our day. But in his time—since it was people of taste, not board-school millions who set the fashions of literature—writers were better educated than now; some equipment of scholarship was counted an advantage to them; to be illiterate was not then the common condition of a 'literary man.' They were better paid, to boot, oddly enough, if you except our popular novelists; even Goldsmith, the unlucky, got £100 for a poem. And if you come to names and achievements—Johnson, Gray, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Fielding, Sterne—I can tell you of a greater poet and (in my opinion) a greater novelist now alive, but the humorists? I think, on the whole, that Mr. Walpole's time will stand a

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close scrutiny of names. By the way, three of those I have mentioned were quite unappreciated by Mr. Walpole, their contemporary: I leave the moral to you. Let us turn to the stage, which in his time was not, as a living and producing thing, divorced from letters. They had Garrick: we have—but it is idle to talk of acting. For plays they, as we, were largely the lucky slaves of Shakespeare. But they had Goldsmith and Sheridan, and had not forgotten Congreve. It may be that there are no comedies in English unquestionably great save certain of Shakespeare's and *The Way of the World*; still the comedies of Sheridan and Goldsmith were comedies, not farces dashed with sentiment or melodrama.

What is it that charms us most in him? Is it wit? Or humour? Or egotism? Or unselfishness? Or—I will come to my own creed in a moment, but first I am old-fashioned enough to insist on talking of wit and humour. It is a common observation that jokes—and jokes must largely form the wit of letters—do not pass current to another generation. Even those but twenty years out of date fall flat—perhaps more especially those. When they linger on, as in the pages

of Mr. Punch, we do not shriek and roar at them, much less smile. On the whole, those in Horace Walpole are exceptionally apt, and even the puns are generally good, though they had a context and manner that are hard to recover. But they are not always even happy, and I am sometimes tempted to suspect that his quotations of George Selwyn are not always so kind as they seem. Humour is another thing: rare humour is for all ages. Mr. Walpole's vein of irony when, as often happens, it is sustained in the bland, subtle method, is irresistible. There is an occasional odd touch of sympathetic and unexpected humour—a 'modern' touch, it often is. Such as his 'laughing for half an hour' over the death of the negus-drinking baronet, a laugh which echoes as one reads. And sometimes a story with a point of humour goes straight to one's sense of the comical. Do you remember the story of the stile and the passing coach and '*there was Mr. Conway and Lady Ailesbury looking on*'? A little coarse, our pedants of delicacy would say, but it is a story for hearty laughter. Yes, and the pedants of delicacy if they told it—and since it happened it positively had to be told—would have left it

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far less delicate, with their foolish obscurity, than Mr. Walpole.

Yet wit and humour do not account, to my mind, for all the charm. You may add the antiquarian interest, the interest of customs, the friendship, the tact, the genuine good sense. All these you may add and I am not satisfied. Something is left, and alas! I have no better name for it but a trite and much misused one—atmosphere. The atmosphere is of a compact, intimate society, found, not made by individual choice, yet impregnable. A very few hundred people, secure of position, there by indubitable right of accident, formed English society, were England in a sense. That society was, as it were, a fixed stratum of caste, and therefore there was hardly room for snobbery, which belongs to societies of shifting sand. Of course I do not mean to say that a community of strata is an ideal social polity: I am aware that the shifting sand may bring more happiness to a nation at large. But for those who belong to it that compact society meant—*sua si bona norant*—advantages of social life quite beyond the vulgar advantages of wealth and power. To those who belonged to it: no doubt if one had

lived then and not been of this society, its advantages might have been a nuisance. But reading of it a hundred years later one feels the charm, of course, as not outside it. A society of equality, with courtesies well understood, with familiarities regulated but sufficient, on a friendly acquaintance, for pleasant intercourse: a society in short, where everybody knew everybody and of everybody, and there need be no hesitations nor mistakes. In the flowing, unregulated multitudinous society of modern England there may be greater pleasure in the bulk; the pleasures of snobbery, of social ambition, and progressive exclusiveness, and the rest of it, are all an addition, no doubt. I do not despise snobbery: it is convenient to the minor satirist, and I firmly believe that it is mainly responsible for keeping our Government—of either party—stable and respectable. And the other society could not last; it was almost an anachronism a hundred years ago, and it would be ridiculous now. But it afforded an unembarrassed scope for those who had ability to impart or to receive the added charm of grace or intellect, and it surrounded its best examples, in St. James's or in country houses, with a

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vanished atmosphere of which the pleasantness lingers, as nowhere else, in Horace Walpole.

But one must not leave off without a note of more obvious humanity. One likes Horace Walpole's sturdy loyalty and care for his father's memory, even though it strengthened that Whiggery of his which to me is one of his few antipathies. And here I wish to do penance for an offence. In the days of my comparative youth I believed a scandalous story, to the effect that Horace Walpole was really the son of Car, Lord Hervey, the brother of the more famous John, who preceded him in the title—the second of the then Earl of Bristol—and wrote the interesting memoirs and married the renowned Molly Lepel, the lady who was in due time to receive some of Horace's most agreeable letters. I used to believe this wicked story; it was attractive, and if it had been true, it would have fitted in very nicely. For the Herveys were a distinguished, lettered, eccentric, brilliant family, and the Walpoles were very much the reverse; if you except Sir Robert, whose genius was as unlike Horace's as an elephant is to a greyhound, who was there? It was

pleasant to see resemblances in Hervey's Memoirs. But that was no justification for believing a scandal on wholly insufficient evidence and printing one's belief in a little book. I hereby do penance, and beg pardon in the shades of Horace, Sir Robert, Car Hervey—if that is necessary, and more especially of Lady Walpole, the first wife, not 'the Skerrit.' To resume, one likes Horace Walpole's loyalty to his cousin, General Conway, and admires that close friendship of sixty years. One likes perhaps even more his tender affection and care for his old blind friend, Madame du Deffand. But how much there is in reading the letters of sixty years to make one sad. I think the saddest imagination of a novelist never affected me more than that record of how in a long life a man's friends die or are changed. After a series of letters to a friend his name drops out; there are no more letters: presently you read in a letter to another a regret for the friend's death. One reads—it is the keenest example—the many long letters to George Montagu, ranging over forty years, and varying from jolly fun to earnest advice; there is a long interval; and when his death is mentioned

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(to Mr. Cole) it is added: 'he had dropped me, partly from politics and partly from caprice.' It distresses one though—or is it because?—it happened so long ago, and all the more if one cannot add the sentimentalist's 'Let us hope'—and so forth.

I have mentioned antipathies, and I confess to a very few, that are minor and accidental. He was intolerant, politically, to Catholics, and he took a somewhat exceeding care of himself in the way of temperance. His creed was Whiggery, though as reasoned as Whiggery may be. It followed that he was unfeeling to those executed for treason in '46. But all this matters little—still, I wish with all my heart that he had appreciated Charles II.

Horace Walpole is for every humour. If you are wise he confirms you with a pleasant philosophy, though he hated the name; if you are flippant, he tells you a comical, perhaps a wicked story; if you are complaisant, he charms you with agreeable courtesies; if you would rail at your age, he turns you many a contemptuous text from his. When first I read him it was as he would have liked to be read, in an old country house, which he would have tasted



(but I think he never went thither), lying on the grass in a hot summer. The edition was Peter Cunningham's best, the volumes easy to handle on one's back. I was really young then, and care was a whimsical, toothless, puppy. When last I read him it was in London and the weather was mostly savage, and care was grown to as vicious a dog as Madame du Deffand's Tonton. The edition was in one huge volume, three large ones bound together, and making the very fattest book I ever saw outside Holy Writ, which I suppose is made awkward to read to augment the piety of the reader. Both times was I charmed all through and lived altogether in the days of the Georges, Second and Third. And so I have taken the liberty of exhibiting my gratitude with such decency as I might. In doing this, I am grown equanimous, and if I have made any odious comparisons I beg pardon. I did not mean them.

## CHARLES FOX AND CHARLES THE SECOND

Not only Plutarch, but historians without number have loved to draw parallels and contrasts between heroes, philosophers, and statesmen, brace by brace. Sometimes the process is as full of suggestion and instruction as an egg is full of meat, sometimes it is not. But it is always easy. As thus: If your A and your B suggest obvious likenesses, 'just as A,' you remark, with such pomp and gravity as may be yours to command, 'was this and did that, so B was this and did so-and-so.' Or if you cannot hit on the likeness—but there are likenesses between most people—your contrast swells your page. 'Whereas A,' say you, 'was this, B was that; whereas A did so-and-so, B did t'other thing.' There are no two personages in history who may not be coupled or separated in this honoured manner. In adopting it for the case of Charles the Second and Charles James Fox, I do not

pretend to make any profound discovery or to solve any important problem. The idea of heredity, which many absurd people, ignorant of their Bibles, thought to have first occurred to the human race a few years ago, must be as old as family life; but since men of science still dispute about its most elementary applications, we can hardly learn much scientific truth from the case of a man and his great-great-grandson. But it is at least interesting, or so I would hope, to find in two of the most distinguished figures—distinguished for their personal qualities—in English history who stood in this relation some notable likenesses in habits, qualities, and tastes, however merely a coincidence those likenesses may have been, and in one particular it will be found that the likeness is something more than curious.

Charles Fox's mother was, you remember, Lady Caroline Lennox, granddaughter of the first Duke of Richmond of that family, who was the son of Charles the Second and Louise de Querouailles, Duchess of Portsmouth. It is an odd circumstance, by the way, and a rather interesting example of 'links with the past,' that old Stephen, the founder of the Fox family, was Charles

the Second's contemporary, though his son (born when he was eighty years old) married Charles's great-granddaughter. Charles Fox's father, the first Lord Holland, made a runaway match of it,—but I am bound to assume that my reader knows all these things, having read his Lord John Russell or his Sir George Trevelyan, or at least Jesse's *Selwyn and his Contemporaries*, that fascinating panorama of social England in the last half of the eighteenth century, from which Sir George Trevelyan, by the way, draws most of his liveliest passages. Regretfully I make that assumption, and refer to the knowledge we both, my reader and I, possess merely to illustrate and embellish my little parallel.

First, in the approved fashion, we will get rid of the obvious differences. It is some years since I took the liberty, in *The New Review*, of eulogising Charles the Second, but I still remember the solemnity with which the *Spectator*, a literary paper, taking me perhaps a little too literally, warned my editor against having anything more to do with me. I will say now only that, compared with the general run of kings, Charles the Second was a person of remarkable abili-

ties, and performed in some directions—in spite of the errors the Whigs have made so notorious, but which were surpassed by many other kings before and since—a very useful work, and that he had many attractive qualities as a man and an artist in social life. And I am ready to admit that Charles James Fox was in natural genius the greater man of the two. Certainly he had far greater ‘educational advantages’ in the ordinary use of the phrase. At an age when the king was being knocked about in the Civil Wars, and intriguing abroad as best he might, the statesman was using his extraordinary powers of absorption in making himself a finished scholar at Eton—though of course he was a pickle there, and was accused, alas! of having lowered the tone of the place—and at Oxford, until Lord Holland, that strange parent, insisted on his leaving his studies for the dissipations of Paris. (Not a judicious father—he allowed Charles to choose his school at ten, and started him as a gambler at sixteen—but one cannot help smiling at the excellent Dr. Jesse’s denunciations of these ‘criminal indulgences,’ and Sir George Trevelyan’s cold severity concerning the mismanagement of the ‘poor fellow,’ Charles’s, early life. With

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all the facilities for raking of his time and class, Charles could hardly have been restrained by parental authority.) Also, of course, their periods were different, though not by a thousandth part so different as either from our own: Fox's was more comfortable and less vehement, more widely cultivated, especially in the case of its women—Madame du Deffand, Lady Hervey, and the Duchess of Devonshire were women of greater knowledge and sense than the high-spirited wantons of Charles the Second's Court, or even than the Frenchwomen of Molière's ridicule—more complex, though not much, in its interests; less open, though not a great deal, in its passions.

The fact that Charles the Second was a king and Charles Fox was not, does not imply so important a difference as it might be supposed. Since the nobles of the later Roman Republic and the Venetian oligarchy there had not been—and most assuredly there has not been since—a ruling class so compactly powerful, so wealthy, or with such a free hand generally, in the world, as that into which Charles Fox was born. It was in a truth 'all kings.' With few exceptions, which were succoured by Government jobs

or the friendly generosity of a non-commercial age, its members were set all together above the sordid needs of life. They visited one another in their country houses and palaces; they were at home together in St. James's Street; they knew practically the whole of their class in a personal sense, and were intimate with all its private affairs, which they discussed with a reasonably justified air of discussing the affairs of England; so compact and secure was their society that its great ladies, as Sir George Trevelyan reminds us, had no need to send invitations to men for their parties. Now, the most important result of all this compactness in a class impregnable and ruling without question was to make possible the widest liberty of public and private action. It could afford such liberty to a degree absolutely unknown in our political men on the one hand, or the lives of our aristocracy and their friends on the other—unknown, that is to say, without subsequent disaster. It is indeed an odd comment on the virtues of our 'Great Revolution,' that it should have produced a society in which were possible the private—the word is one of courtesy—and public excesses of Charles Fox. 'Charles'

might do precisely that which he pleased, lose his money, lose his friends' money, at cards and dice, drink and rake with all the joyous effusion of his wonderful constitution; he might openly attack the king and wear Washington's livery in the House to show his sympathy with the Americans—which even they, now happily our friends, will understand was not kind to his country: but he was 'Charles,' a privileged and widely beloved personage of society, and society never thought of giving him the cold shoulder. A little good-natured bantering from George Selwyn at White's or Brooks's—that was the only penalty. I am not accusing the society; it could afford to do what it did, and what it did was determined by socially logical considerations. Still less do I accuse 'Charles,' being one of the few persons who still think—in spite of Thackeray's depriving genius of its indulgences—that the unlucky results of hot blood are a small price to pay (as it sometimes has to be paid) for such genius or such charm as that of Charles Fox. But it was an odd society to be established by the principles of the 'glorious Revolution,' the 'liberties' of which, indeed, seemed to have been the liberties of



public aggrandisement and private licence enjoyed by a small and favoured class, just as the liberties of the early Liberals, the heirs of these Whigs, were the public importance and private enrichment of the manufacturers. The comparison with the Venetian oligarchy was pushed as far as it would go by Disraeli: as for the nobles of the Roman Republic, it was not an inept comparison which Fox's contemporaries made between him and Julius Cæsar—they never thought of mine—whose early manhood, with its profligacy and debt and public influence and fame combined, was indeed a close prototype of Fox. 'I do not think,' so Horace Walpole wrote to Conway, 'I can find in Patin<sup>1</sup> or Plato, nay, nor in Aristotle, a parallel case to Charles Fox: there are advertised to be sold more annuities of his and his society, to the amount of five hundred thousand pounds a year! I wonder what he will do next, when he has sold the estates of all his friends!' And Gibbon, when Fox had distinguished himself in a debate about the Thirty-nine Articles, wrote to Lord Sheffield: 'I congratulate you on the late victory of our dear

<sup>1</sup> Guy Patin, to wit, in whose letters Walpole found a passage maliciously applicable to the Fox history.

mamma, the Church of England. By the bye, Charles Fox prepared himself for the holy work by passing twenty-two hours in the pious exercise of hazard; his devotion cost him only about five hundred pounds an hour—in all, eleven thousand pounds.' Fox was about twenty-one at this time, followed minutely (as Sir George Trevelyan shows from the betting-book at Brooks's) by the eyes of English society in all the surprises of his parliamentary successes and financial disasters. I doubt if any other society could have produced him: in any case, even Charles the Second had to bear more unkind criticism and more troublesome consequences of his passions than this younger son of a Georgian great man.

Let us pass to the likenesses. The most obviously important and fortunate for either man was their extraordinary power, constitutional and enduring, of shutting the door of their minds on what was unpleasant. No two men were ever less haunted by their troubles or difficulties. The power which enabled the king after Worcester field to take his hardships with a light heart and enjoy whatever was to be enjoyed in his hidings, though it were only a dinner of

bread and cheese, or later, in the midst of troubles from Court and Parliament and an empty exchequer, to write amusing letters to his sister, the Duchess of Orleans, full of chatter and jesting and affection, and to leave off with, 'and so good night, for I am faste a sleepe'—that power enabled Fox (for so runs the extraordinary tale), after an afternoon of hot debate in the House and an evening of incessant and prodigious losses at cards and dice, to lay his head on the gaming-table and literally fall fast asleep like his royal ancestor. The stolidity of stupid men may sometimes imitate the effects of this power, but I doubt if men of brains and temperament often enjoy its indulgence. *A fortiori*, both men could turn from one engrossing pursuit to another with complete detachment. On the king's politics hung his own position, almost his existence, and the existence of monarchy in England: on Fox's hung genuine principles and a leaping and keen ambition. Each, as we know, was a sensualist. But both could turn from pleasures to politics with ready attention and brains undulled, from politics to pleasures with zest and good-humour unimpaired. Charles the Second played with his spaniels,

studied his favourite physics and chemistry, or showed his friends his curiosities of art, though the Dutch had declared war or Parliament had refused money. Charles Fox was deep in his beloved classics before the town's interest in his defeat at politics or play had had time to begin. And this was not insensibility in either case, as Horace Walpole, for example, thought it was in Fox's; you remember his conversation with Charles a few minutes after seeing Charles's furniture carried out by his creditors into St. James's Street. The king's letters prove his warmth and eagerness, at least in the early years of his reign, in public affairs; and Fox proved the reality of his feelings—in the case of play, by having the strength to give it up when his folly was brought home to him; in the case of politics, by the devotion of his life. But both had that great quality of abstraction.

That was the most important, though not (as I hope will be seen) the most curious likeness. To come to more common attributes, both were men of great family affection. Putting passion on one side, Fox's attention to his father, who in his letters quite forgot his son's extravagance in dwelling on the charm

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of his companionship, his delight in the society and care for the interests of his nephew Holland—the host of Holland House when it was most famous—and his long tenderness for his wife, remind me of his ancestor's love and friendship for his sister, Henrietta, and his kindness—in all their scrapes—for his natural children. Both had a personal fascination which was universally acknowledged. Both were sportsmen, perhaps a thing of course, but both, more curiously, were famous for their love of walking for walking's sake, a rare taste in Englishmen who have the opportunity of sport, as walkers who seek for comrades know: the king tired out his courtiers up and down St. James's Park, and Fox tested by walking the exact distance of the villages within a wide circuit of his house at St. Anne's Hill. Both were spendthrifts and comically impecunious.

‘He has met, I'm afraid, with so many hard knocks,  
That cash is not plenty with this Mr. Fox.

And he always must lose, for the strongest of locks  
Couldn't keep any money for this Mr. Fox,’

wrote a contemporary poet; and ‘a merry monarch, scandalous and poor,’ was the

summary of Rochester, while both accepted their impecuniosity with good temper. Lord Carlisle to Selwyn: 'Charles Fox left us this morning. He has been excellent company, in good spirits, and not the worse for having levanted every soul at Newmarket, after having lost everything he could raise upon Stavordale's bond.' Poor Stavordale! Both desired to mitigate the brutality of their ages towards criminals or alleged criminals—the king in the case of witches, Fox in that of unhappy women who had concealed the birth of natural children. Both were in private fond of French friends and manners, and in public over-indulgent to France. Fox in his early days was a fine gentleman down to his dress, smuggling, as all his set used, his clothes from Paris—a Macaroni, in fact:

'But hark, the voice of battle shouts from far;  
The Jews and Macaronis are at war:  
The Jews prevail, and, thundering from the stocks,  
They seize, they bind, they circumcise Charles Fox.'

But in later days he was the first important person to set a fashion of plain and simple attire; and I am reminded—a little inevitably, I know—of Charles the Second's trying to start, on Evelyn's advice, a fashion of plain 'Persian' dress, to supersede the costly

French mode, meeting with as poor success as another royal innovator, and being mocked by Louis XIV., who straightway put the 'Persian' dress on his footmen. But I am growing too minute for my reader's patience.

At this point I am assailed by a doubt, a fear, that somebody should make an obvious but at first sight quite fatal criticism. In most of Charles Fox's qualities mentioned, I may be told, he took after his father, the first Lord Holland, who was no relation whatever to Charles the Second. But, after all, I should be undisturbed, for all I have claimed so far is an interesting coincidence. I think, however, that the resemblance found between the two Foxes—I admit that the people who knew them both always found it—was greatly exaggerated. Holland had been a spendthrift in his youth; but he lived to amass an enormous fortune (by public speculation), a getting habit of which his worst enemy could not accuse the son. And what of course made a great impression on their contemporaries, the elder and younger Fox had an elder and younger Pitt for opponents. 'History repeats itself,' said the wiseacres, and when Charles Fox rose to speak in the House he was declared the

image of his father in voice and bearing, as the sons of famous men have been invariably declared. But Holland had not his son's power of detachment, or anything like it, or all his good-humour either. His later letters are full of querulous diatribes against the politicians who had 'betrayed' him, although his ill-gotten fortune—and it is difficult to see for what else he had been a statesman—was left to him entire, until Charles began to run through it. When he wrote from Nice of the climate and scenery and so forth, he interrupted himself to heap curses on the unlucky Rigby, his chief 'betrayed,' a proceeding altogether impossible to Charles Fox or Charles the Second. He was an agreeable, good-natured man in the main, and among a great deal of insufferable verse wrote those lines to the beautiful Lady Sarah Lennox—the lady whom George the Third wished to marry—about the infatuated Lord Carlisle which are quite charming. But he was altogether, in genius and character, on a different plane from his son's, and I decline to allow him to stand in the way of my comparison.

I come to my most interesting fact, which I have tried to foreshadow importantly,



and which in fact started me on my essay. Charles James Fox and Charles the Second were both remarkable refutations of the people who infer characters from faces. They were unlike in body, the king being lean and his descendant fat,—

‘I pity the horses of this Mr. Fox,’—

but in face they were notably alike, both swarthy and harsh-featured. (Here again that annoying Lord Holland comes in: he also was a dark man.

‘If that black face and that black heart  
Be not old Holland’s counterpart,  
Holland himself’s unlike the devil,’

—so wrote an agreeable satirist. I mention the fact, not to be an unscrupulous upholder of a thesis—but let it rest.) Stern, harsh-featured, forbidding, swarthy, black-browed, such were the faces of Charles Fox and Charles the Second; gentle, kindly, affable, good-humoured, easy to others and their own tastes and passions, such were both their characters in an eminent degree. You will grant it is curious. No one, of course, can explain how such a contradiction repeated itself after four generations. But with many ordinary instances of the ‘throw-

back' in my mind, I cannot but think that this peculiar combination of faces and dispositions did really imply an inheritance of both. But I fear the men of science would contradict me. . . .

The other question, of the combination of those opposites in one man or the other, being also insoluble, suggests one other question yet: How much is worth that science of character which so many writers have had the air of understanding? Since history began to be written historians have gone through the easy process of inferring qualities from actions, and when these actions are contradictory—'In this instance, perhaps,' say the historians, 'he was not so-and-so'; or, 'It is strange that one who was so much this should have been so much that.' But that is statement, not explanation. How often are the contradictions explained? How often does any writer on character even attempt the scientific process of searching inductively until he finds some probable hypothesis of a cause from which deductions to include all contradictions may be derived—arguing, whether inductively or deductively, with all the facts before him? Very seldom. We are told that a brave

man had a strain of cowardice in him, or a generous man a strain of meanness; metaphors tumble over metaphors, and in the end we are merely left with contradictions as difficult to be reconciled as before. Charles Fox had a profound love of quiet study—we know that from the amount of time he spent over his books; but Charles Fox loved also the noisy assembly and racecourse. Where one love excludes the other the limitation is held to be natural, and, as it were, inevitable: where both exist we are told that the man was complex in his tastes. It is all words and words, and we are no nearer understanding the complexities and contradictions. I doubt the science of reconciling them will make little progress in my time. I cannot explain the contradictions of Charles Fox's character, any more than I can explain why Charles the Second looked fierce and was kind. I take an easier line, and content myself with musing over my suggestion—that some essential genius in the king's strong blood went down to the greatest of his descendants.

## GEORGE SELWYN'S LETTERS

THE *prima facie* importance of the recent discovery of George Selwyn's letters among the MSS. at Castle Howard to people interested in the society of the eighteenth century is obvious. George Selwyn, we knew from universal testimony of the time, was one of the most important figures in it, of a great and enduring reputation as a wit at large and as everybody's friend. We knew a great deal about him—his life in London, his sojournings in Paris, his intimacy with that splendid profligate and racing-man, the Earl of March, who lived to be 'old Q,' the last Duke of Queensberry, his lazy jokes and chaff, his adoption of Mie Mie and his troubles with her fiery and flighty mother, the Marchesa Fagniani,—we knew all this from that delightful collection of letters to him which every one quotes, and which prove very pleasantly in what sincere affection 'dear George' was held by statesmen and ne'er-do-wells, by wives, wits, and wantons.

But we had of Selwyn's own writing two or three letters only, and those when he was a very young man and was bothered about money—letters sufficiently unremarkable.

Now we have all his letters to the fifth Earl of Carlisle, and for those to whom the cumbrous volumes of the Historical mss. Commission are over-formidable there has been made a manageable selection. First, as to the merits of the selection. It can be safely recommended to those whom the subject attracts, but who are not already familiar with the persons and topics which occur. The editors' notes are clear, succinct, and sufficient. The late Mr. Jesse was somewhat diffuse, and the incessant biographies which interrupted the letters were sometimes superfluous. Mr. Roscoe and Miss Clergue have avoided this mistake: enough is told one of the important people, the very minor characters are swiftly dismissed. The style of biography of which Moore's Byron and Lockhart's Scott are the earliest examples, the style in which the letters are interrupted by a thread of narrative, was not in this case open to the objection occasionally noticed in the others, that one is confused by the two voices of the biographer

and the biographeed; because the events of Selwyn's life were so few that the narrative consists merely of an occasional note on politics and the position of his correspondent, as Commissioner in America or as Lord Lieutenant in Ireland. But a drawback to easy and continuous reading exists for a reason in which, practically, I find my only ground for criticism. Selwyn was a careless writer. Evidently he did not watch his pen closely. He has gone so far astray as to write 'make take' for 'may take,' and he habitually writes a great deal more 'like a gentleman' than like a grammarian: nominatives and accusatives were all one to him, and he always writes 'neither . . . or.' Well, that being the case, it was surely enough to note it and assure the reader that the faults were Selwyn's and not the printer's. But both the Historical MSS. Commission and the editors of the selection correct him every time. As thus: 'neither . . . [n]or,' 'I [me],' 'who[m],' and a whole army of '(sic)'s. Selwyn writes, 'terrible long': and why not? 'Mighty fine' continues to this day. It annoys one to see 'terrible (sic) long,' and confuses one's attention. But perhaps this is a small matter. The selection, as a

selection, is good. Many of us have a violent prejudice against all selections as selections. But in this case if any but genuine amateurs were to read the book a selection had to be made. Many details of past politics which are (or are not) familiar from other sources were wisely omitted, and many lengthy passages dealing with the more technical aspect of Charles Fox's debts, his multifarious bonds and annuities and so forth, were perhaps (though personally I find the whole story entertaining) rightly thought too voluminous. One principle of omission which in such books I believe to be a radically bad principle was not in question. I refer to omissions made on grounds of 'decency' or 'refinement' or whatever it is called when people are afraid of the common possibilities of life, and I call it a bad principle, because one reads such books largely to observe differences in manners, and greater freedom of language and allusion is one of those very differences—so that the omissions give a false effect. In this case there are two omissions—one concerning the wild Lord Baltimore and a wickedness he committed, and the other a son of Lord Onslow and a very unpleasant

event which ruined him—which, I think, might have been kept, if only to show that the period was no better than our own; but the editors have the justification that such things were alien to the general tone of the letters. Selwyn hardly ever uses a coarse expression, and is far apter to ask kind questions about a man's children than to talk scandal about a man's wife. On the whole, then, the selection is to be cordially praised.

To speak, now, of the letters as a whole. The date of the last of those to Selwyn published in Jesse's book was September 1780. The last of these was dated but a month before Selwyn's death in January 1791. So there is a gain of ten years. On the other hand, the correspondence in Jesse begins when Selwyn was at Oxford: the first of these was written in 1767, when Selwyn was forty-eight: he was thirty years older than Lord Carlisle. However, the intervening years are not largely represented in Jesse, and it is probable, to judge from the rather jerky letters to Selwyn which occur in the interval, that he himself was not so assiduous a correspondent as he became with cooling blood. There is a break between 1767 and 1773; but since Jesse prints



several letters from Lord Carlisle in those years, the unfortunate explanation must be that Selwyn's were not kept. As for the matter and manner, it must be said at once that whoever was sanguine enough to expect another Horace Walpole must be entirely disappointed. Walpole's cold and impersonal habit of regarding life may be a less sympathetic quality than Selwyn's affectionate and intensely human disposition, but it made a far more entertaining writer. Selwyn wrote, it is true, of everything in the purview of a man who lived almost entirely in London—save for his long stays in Paris in the earlier years—who went everywhere and knew everybody, and who had, on the whole, better opportunities for intimate observation in important matters even than Walpole: he writes of all this more or less, but also he hurries quickly from it to write of Mie Mie's health, or to inquire after the health of Lord Carlisle's children. That was what really interested him, and no one but a churl could read the result and not love him therefor: no one but a nurse could read the result and not wish that his zeal had been a little less incessant. Selwyn was lazy, and whether Walpole wrote for posterity or

not, his observation and wit are incomparably keener. As for style, Walpole's we know; Selwyn's carelessness of grammar is beside the point, except to a pedant, but he was also careless in thought, and therefore often involved and obscure in phrasing. His habit, too, of frequently using French where English would have done as well, though in him a natural habit, does not make for an easy style.

The letters, then, are no such possession as Horace Walpole's. We ought to remember, of course, that we have only these to one correspondent—a few at the end to Lady Carlisle—a man thirty years younger than the writer, and one whose attraction was largely that he was the father of children to whom Selwyn felt as a grandfather. We have not—and would that we had!—his letters to Gilly Williams, or Edgumbe, or Horace Walpole himself, which three with Selwyn formed the 'out-of-town' society at Strawberry Hill, or March or 'Bully' as they called the second Lord Bolingbroke, or his brother Harry St. John, 'the Baptist,' or in the younger group to Charles Fox or Storer, to whom he was not concerned to be a mentor as he was to Carlisle. We have not

those letters; but those we have, apart from their interest and attractiveness as touching the writer's character, to which we shall come later, give us both innumerable details of social interest and a complete picture, painted unconsciously and little by little, of perhaps the most agreeable society these islands have known. Something was said in another essay of the licence which power, exclusiveness, and security made possible in this society. Something might now be added of the social ease and gay intimacy and understanding, the light-hearted but not insolent assumption that 'Charles's' faro bank or 'Bully's' divorce were matters of prime moment, which were made possible at the same time, and the like of which can never exist for cultivated and intelligent folk again. We may build up an agreeable little society; but it is accidental and partial, and that greater bully the spirit of the age has ordained that if it is to be intelligent it may not be gay. Something of this might be added, but ineffectively; the charm is not to be had at second-hand; you may get it of Walpole or Selwyn, not of me.

At one point the political interest is considerable—the time (1782) when Fox

overthrew Lord North's Ministry and Lord Rockingham came in. Selwyn's position was typical of the intelligent sinecurist of the period; but no one else has given us so frank and amusing an exposition of the intelligent sinecurist's dismay. He had commanded four votes in the House, and still commanded two: as a matter of course he held one of those lucrative posts with no duties attached which rewarded such 'political services.' Such an arrangement seemed to him to be natural, and indeed necessary to the stability of the country. He does indeed admit a hint that, as a matter of theory, he saw objections to it. When Burke brought in his bill to abolish certain of these posts, Selwyn wrote: 'I believe there is no actor upon the stage of either theatre who, repeating what the author has wrote, does not at the same time recite his own private sentiments oftener than our pantomimes in Parliament' —impartially of both sides; but he voted quietly against the bill. The passage, by the way, contains the first reference to the younger Pitt in the letters: 'Jack [Townshend] did better than the time before, but was so eclipsed by Mr. W. Pitt that it appeared to impartial people but an indifferent

performance. This young man, Mr. Pitt, gained an universal applause. I heard Lord North say it was the best first speech of a young man that he had ever heard.' He disapproved of measures, obviously thinking the American War mismanaged—as indeed so did every one else: 'I cannot divert myself of thinking upon what must occupy everybody's mind, which is our public calamity and disgrace.' But he was not for dismissing men—men who had made that excellent little arrangement about the sinecure. So that when Lord North fell he was appalled: he thought Fox and his friends mad. It was natural enough. That system of 'the king's friends,' by which George III. had contrived to do such enormous damage to the country, had existed a good many years; and Selwyn, who knew Charles Fox as an unprecedented and shameless spendthrift and gambler, could not 'see' him as a Minister. But his lugubrious fears for the constitution, for Carlisle's future, for his own place, are curious and entertaining reading. Fox's abuse of the king horrified him. 'He spoke of all coming to a final issue now within a very short space of time; he talked of the King under the description of Satan; . . . he has adopted all

the supremacy he pretended to dread in his Majesty. It seems a dream when I survey his figure and know his history.' There is an odd passage in this connection of Lord Selborne imitating George II.'s manner in the House of Lords in the presence of his grandsons; this other and very curious passage (in the light of history) concerning Pitt: 'He is a young man who will undoubtedly make his way in the world by his abilities. But to give him credit for being very extraordinary, upon what I heard yesterday, would be absurd'—one is reminded of Charles Greville's doubts of the young Disraeli;—and in the beginning of the American War it is 'a little dispute.' But Selwyn had not a political mind, and in this regard he is accidentally curious only, not important.

Through all the letters marches that grand, noble, ironic procession of Charles James Fox. As a statesman he was not understood by Selwyn, who nevertheless remained on good-humoured terms with him socially. But as the prince of impecunious spendthrifts, Selwyn observed him with unfailing humour and irony, really scandalised though he sometimes was, and really indignant on Carlisle's behalf, who was one of the many victims of

Charles's complicated system of loans and bonds. Early in the correspondence he urges Carlisle to sue Charles: 'If you are shocked, you will be singly so; Charles will not be so, it is my firm belief.' Later on, when Fox was in funds, Selwyn 'contrived to wrench out of Charles's black hands 50 pounds for Spencer by watching the opportunity of his play.' Fox had a brief period of prosperity when he ran his famous faro bank at Brooks's. That faro bank indeed marks an epoch in our social history, and the mere fact that it was held in the face of the world at Brooks's—at Brooks's!—by the chief member of the Opposition, on the verge of being a Minister, tells us what a long journey we have made since then. (It was at this time, I suppose, when Fox's friends came to consult him on politics in the intervals of his banking, that Brooks's first took its tone of a Whig club.) Fox went into partnership with other congenial spirits, of whom Hare—'the Hare with many friends'—was the chief, and they seem to have run their bank day and night, relieving one another for statesmanship and sleep. They were successful, and if only they could have resisted the temptation of punting against one another, might have made fortunes. 'I saw Charles

to-day in a new hat, frock, waistcoat, shirt, and stockings; he was as clean and smug as a gentleman, and upon perceiving my surprise, he told me that it was from the Pharo bank.' (There is a neat pun about 'Pharaoh's daughter' in another place.) 'He then talked of the thousands it had lost, which I told him only proved its substance, and the advantage of the trade. He smiled, and seemed perfectly satisfied with that which he had taken up: he was in such a sort of humour that I should have liked to have dined with him. His old clothes, I suppose, have been burned like the paupers at Salt Hill.' At another time, by the way, Fox's ingenuity, in talk at White's, 'planned out a kind of itinerant trade, which was going from horse-race to horse-race, and so, by knowing the value and speed of all the horses in England, to acquire a certain fortune'—so do great minds anticipate the future. Selwyn has a longer passage than Walpole's on the seizure of Charles's furniture:—

'You must know that for these two days past, all passengers in St. James' Street have been amused with seeing two carts at Charles's door filling, by the Jews, with his goods, clothes, books, and pictures. He was waked by Basilico yesterday, and Hare afterwards by his *valet de chambre*, they being told at the same time that the execution was begun, and the carts were



drawn up against the door. Such furniture I never saw. Betty and Jack Manners are perpetually in a survey of this operation, and Charles, with all Brooks's on his behalf, in the highest spirits.'

A year later Charles was Secretary for Foreign Affairs. But even Charles was not allowed to go all lengths without some mild protest. 'This Pharo Bank is held in a manner which, being so exposed to public view, bids defiance to all decency and police. The whole town as it passes views the dealer and the partners, by means of the candles and the windows being levelled with the ground. The Opposition, who have Charles for their ablest advocate, is quite ashamed of the proceeding, and hates to hear it mentioned.' What *would* the present Liberal party have said to its ablest advocate? Regretfully I tear myself from Charles, and proceed to other points of interest I have noted.

There is, of course, a great deal about Mie Mie. At the end of Jesse's book she was still a baby; by the end of this, a young lady going to her first ball. (Selwyn had taken her on a visit when she was four: one can hardly help wondering if his friends did not sometimes find Mie Mie rather in the way.) She goes with Lady Caroline, Carlisle's

daughter, to the Richmond Theatre to see 'that *étourdi* Lord Barrymore play the fool in three or four different characters.' There is nothing to clear up the mystery of her parentage. But, in fact, I do not think there was a mystery. The town of course said that Selwyn was her father, because he adopted her, and Jesse was undecided between him and the Duke of Queensberry. I agree with the editors of this selection that the latter was the likelier man, else he would never have left her the fortune he did leave, being by no means an affectionate person; but I go farther, and think it conclusively proved by a letter to Selwyn himself (in Jesse) from the Rev. Dr. Warner, in which 'Old Q.'s likeness to her is noted quite casually. If poor Mie Mie was the daughter of one profligate, she lived to marry another and a worse, even that Lord Hertford who was the original of Thackeray's Steyne and Disraeli's Montford, and who was very easily treated by both novelists, if Charles Greville's account of him is to be believed. Mention of the Rev. Dr. Warner reminds me that when I first read Jesse's volumes, many years ago, I was indignant with the picture Thackeray drew of him,

a picture of an unprincipled parasite, with 'Rabelais and Horace at his greasy finger-ends' and so forth—why greasy?—a picture which I imagine suggested Parson Sampson in *The Virginians*. Selwyn's own testimony confirms the opinion of Dr. Warner's good sense and good feeling which any impartial reader of his letters in the books Thackeray saw would have formed.

'I believe him to be a perfectly honest man; he is uncommonly humane and friendly, and most actively so. . . . The Archbishop, who had been applied to in his favour by the late Mr. Townshend, said he was too lively, but it was the worst he could say of him. Lord Besborough served him once essentially, and esteems him. The family of Mr. Hoare, the banker, has assisted him, and so he has been able to support his mother and his nearest relations, whom his father, with a great deal of literary merit, had left beggars.'

Some of the most amusing of Warner's own letters dealt with the matter of the Dowager Lady Carlisle and 'the baron,' as the foreign adventurer whom she unwisely encouraged is always called. Jesse, by the way, with perhaps excessive scruple, omitted the lady's name. Selwyn, the good-natured, tried to interfere, and the lady 'has called me every name but that by which I should be described, and that is your friend,' and

the baron wanted to cut his throat. But at this point there is some slight confusion of dates, and I think that Jesse or the Historical MSS. Commission or the editors of the selection are at fault. It is clear, however, that Selwyn and Warner refer to the same transaction. The baron was ultimately discomfited. . . . As early as February 1781, there is a mention of George IV. and his engaging habits. 'Where the Prince sups, and lies, and with whom, are the chief objects of the politics of a certain class of people. All agree that at present the agreement between him and the King is perfect. The speculation is only how long it is likely to last. His Royal Highness stoops as yet to very low game. In some respects it may be better.' The MSS. of Lord Carlisle, by the way, contain a few characteristically frothy and effusive letters from the Prince. . . . In 1781, there is a mention of White's which reads a little oddly. 'Our Club at White's *commence à tomber; la grande presse n'y est pas; c'est un asyle toujours pour les caducs, et pour ceux qui n'ont pas une passion décidée pour le jeu*——' the stage would seem to have been transitory. . . . In 1782, Selwyn met Beckford—not the famous alderman,

Chatham's friend, but his (now) more famous son, who wrote *Vathek*, and built Fonthill, and lived to acquire the very evil reputation which Byron noticed in one of his letters, and commemorated (I am pretty certain) in his *To Dives, a Fragment*, which was not published till 1832. 'I was last night at Lady Lucan's, to see young Beckford, who seems to possess very extraordinary talents: he is a perfect master of music, but has a voice, either natural or feigned, of a eunuch. He speaks several languages with uncommon facility, and well, but has such a mercurial turn, that I think he may finish his days *aux petites maisons*; his person and figure are agreeable.' . . . In the later years of the letters, there is of course a good deal about the French *émigrés*, who gathered in great numbers at Richmond, where Selwyn, the Duke of Queensberry, and other of their English friends, had houses. English society, indeed, had never—with the possible exception of Charles II.'s court—been so cosmopolitan as in Selwyn's day, and has hardly been so since. Indeed, the society of Paris, as he and his friends knew it, was never recreated. That society was France, just as Selwyn's was England, and the two were

intimate and familiar: Selwyn himself, and his friend Lady Hervey — widow of the famous Hervey of the memoirs—were almost more at home in Paris than in London. The editors of the selection think that the English did not rise to the occasion of hospitality at the Revolution, and of course we all have read of well-born Frenchmen turning fiddlers and dancing-masters at the time; but at first there was a very genuine and substantial outburst of sympathy on the part of their English friends for the *émigrés* who had entertained them in France, and Selwyn's letters show it in more than one passage. . . . Admiral Biron's name, the poet's grandfather, is spelled *sic*, and so Byron spells it once, saying that it was the old form. . . . Last of these miscellaneous matters, I must mention one which has a personal interest for me. George, Lord Morpeth, Carlisle's eldest son, was a little boy in 1772, at school at Neasden, and Selwyn writes: 'When George meets me, he accosts me with these words, "*Quomodo vale my petite sodale*"; où il a péché cette plaisanterie I do not know.' But if any one who was at my preparatory school, Temple Grove, chances to read this article, he will

remember a certain dear ungrammatical chant—

‘ Quomodo vale Mi sodale  
Visne edere pomum  
Si non vis Mirabilis  
Dulce redire domum ’

—we sang it without stops,—and it is quaint to find that there were small boys singing it a hundred years ago.

A word of Selwyn's correspondent. It is the tendency of most biographical writers to make their geese into swans, and I think that Carlisle's qualities have been exaggerated. Because he wrote verses, and was at the same time a man of society and of the world, he has been compared with his kinsman Byron. Jesse goes so far as to say that, if they had been of an age, Byron, instead of abusing him heartily, would have found in him a congenial spirit. I hardly think so. Carlisle was really a very colourless, ordinary person. He wrote extremely bad verses. Byron's ‘paralytic puling of Carlisle’ was quite a fair description (and Byron did not know that Carlisle was actually paralysed at the time): he fell in love with Lady Sarah Bonbury, with whom all the world fell in love; he had some

ambition, and got no farther than being Lord Lieutenant; he lost £10,000 in a sitting at play, which, on the whole, was rather foolish than otherwise, and about which he made a tremendous to-do, bewailing and repenting. No doubt he was an amiable youth when Selwyn first began to be his friend, grew into an amiable man, and begot amiable children for Selwyn to pet. No doubt when Byron came of age, he was a very respectable old gentleman, and was quite justified in looking askance on his unmanageable ward. But he was not a remarkable man.

And now for Selwyn himself. Mr. Roscoe and Miss Clergue's little biography of him is very pleasantly written, and says enough of the events of his uneventful life. Those events do not of themselves promise anything very wonderful, and I am inclined to think that for preliminary interest, it is necessary to read the letters in the oft-referred-to Jesse, and see how various and strong were his powers of friendship: then will the allusions in his own letters to his many friends be read in their true significance. For his outward life, the new letters do little more than emphasise the reluctance



with which he went down to his pretty house of Matson, the loathing he had for the fuss of his election for the neighbouring town of Gloucester, and the terror with which he looked forward to dinners with aldermen and judges. They are not often witty, in the strict use of the word. But it has long been clear that even when we allow for the gloom which time casts over jokes and puns, Selwyn's reputation as a wit must have been due in reality (an allowance of jokes being of course presupposed) to his more general gifts for society, his instinct for the right tone at the right time, his good-humour and quaint imperturbability. I noticed the other day an account of him Lord Holland (Fox's nephew) gave to Charles Greville: 'He describes him as a man of great gravity and deliberation in speaking, and after exciting extraordinary mirth by his wit and drollery, gently smiling and saying, "I am glad you are pleased."' I fancy the great gravity and the rest of it lent reflected colour to the wit and drollery. And all of us remember sayings which at the time and on their occasion have gone straight to the very heart of our sense of humour, and repeated afterwards are quite

without effect. In the letters, however, the context of atmosphere which the reported witticisms cry for is supplied, and Selwyn's demure flashes of irony or pleasant nonsense are often delightful. 'Mr. Brereton is returned to the Bath, and the street robbers seem dispersed'—Mr. Brereton's play was suspected. And here is a passage on Ministers much in Horace Walpole's vein. Selwyn had been asked to take a long journey to meet Pitt and dine on turtle. 'The turtle I should have liked, but how Mr. Pitt is to be dressed I cannot tell. The temptation is great, I grant it, but I have had so much self-denial as to send my excuses. You will not believe it, perhaps, but a Minister of any description, although served up in his great shell of power, and all his green fat about him, is to me a dish by no means relishing, and I never knew but one in my life I could pass an hour with pleasantly, which was Lord Holland'—the first Lord Holland, Fox's father. But no, no; in this respect Selwyn is not Horace Walpole.

When Selwyn was dead, Dr. Warner wrote a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* to urge that his reputed love of executions was merely the chaff of his friends; and though,

as Jesse pointed out, the testimony against this view was too universal not to be believed in part, I think Dr. Warner was so far right, that Selwyn was too lazy and indifferent to contradict many of the stories told against him. This opinion is borne out by the letters. In 1777 a satire called 'The Diaboliad' appeared, in which this taste of Selwyn's was dragged in, and he writes: 'I am only attacked upon that trite and very foolish opinion concerning *le pene ed i delitti*, acknowledging it to proceed from an odd and insatiable curiosity, and not from a *mauvais cœur*. . . . I forgive him his mention of me, because I believe that he does it without malice, but if I had leisure to think of such things, I must own the frequent repetition of the foolish stories would make me peevish.' In another place: 'It is my singular fate for ever to pass for something which I am not, nor cannot be, nor desire to be—sometimes indeed for what I should be ashamed to be. But I am used to this.' One must remember that to see executions was a general amusement of the time, and that a general habit is sometimes a sufficient explanation of contradictions in character: there is no doubt that the thinking and

acting Selwyn was kindly and humane. . . . His good-humour hardly ever fails, but it is clear that the politics of 1782, as I have said, both aroused his seriousness and upset his equanimity, and at this time his expressions grow more violent: Lord Melbourne, who asserted that he had bought a seat in Parliament of Selwyn, is 'this fitz scrivener, fitz coachman, this fitz cook'; and the Duke of Portland, who was spoken of as Carlisle's successor in Ireland, is 'that jolt-headed calf.'

But the note which is never silent for half a page is his love for children. It is pleasant enough to think of him, a man with no 'natural' ties, save to a few nephews and nieces, constituting himself the universal godfather to all the little girls and boys he knew, and finding in that, as even friendships dropped out one by one in his old age, a sufficient employment and consolation. 'The christening is to be, as I understand, to-morrow. I hope in God that I shall be well enough to assist and name the child, and eat cake, and go through all the functions of a good gossip. If I am obliged to give up that which seems to have been my vocation, *c'est fait de moi*; I must declare myself good for nothing.' He repeats (the letter, by the way,

might have been in the selection) some chaff of Gilly Williams: 'Heaven is remarkably indulgent to you, to secure you a nursery *in perpetuo*. The moment the old one is fledged, and takes to wing, you have another, with clouts, and a pap-spoon, to which you are equally attentive.' That—a little unkindly put—was because Selwyn refused an invitation when he was anxious about Lady Caroline and her baby, and rather indignantly he asserts the reasonableness of his affections. But to be a good gossip had indeed become his vocation.

I have quoted a little lengthily, because the letters are new, are of a most sympathetic writer, and will bear the process. But I do not pretend to have quoted anything very wise or witty. That is not the order of the letters, and, once more, we must remember the correspondent, whom Selwyn loved but who was not (it may be) one who stimulated his powers, and we must in fairness believe that if we had others—to other correspondents—the wit would be found. Where are those others? I will not believe they were all destroyed and lost. Somewhere, in some rubbish room in some old house, are lying bundles of letters in which Selwyn exchanged

pleasantry for pleasantry with Horace Walpole, satire for satire with the first Lord Holland, or chaff for chaff with Gilly Williams. I exhort all representatives or inheritors of old families—they need not be so very old either—to hunt in those rubbish rooms.

Meantime I think that something more than a case has been made out for the interest of the letters we now have. And interesting or not for their matters of fact, they perform the good work of rousing one's affection for a man. I have always thought that Thackeray, who made him out nothing but a pleasant-humoured loafer and consumer of good things, spoke in his haste and for effect; and now I am certain that had he read these letters he would have changed his mind. They show us the other side of the good-natured man of the world who loved clubs and good dinners, a little quiet gambling, a little cynical talk at night—the side on which lay playful tenderness for children and deep and anxious affections. He who had no child of his own was above all things in the best sense of the phrase a fatherly man—also, in his age, just the least little bit in the world of a dear old woman.

## LADY SARAH

No one, I suppose, of all those whose fancies have lived pleasantly in the world of Selwyn, and Horace Walpole, and Charles Fox, but has longed to see more of Lady Sarah Lennox. Glimpses we had of her radiant and beautiful youth, when George the Third wanted to marry her, when she married Sir Charles Bunbury and drove Lord Carlisle to despair, and eloped, alas! with Lord William Gordon. We had observed a rare touch of fervour in Horace Walpole, when he described her at the Coronation and in the theatricals at Holland House; we had a charming letter she wrote to George Selwyn; and Sir Joshua has left us the picture of a beauty which no changing fashion can deny. But there was more than this to engage our attention. Wise historians are never uninterested in the mothers of great men, and this beautiful giddy girl, who dazzled the world in London and at Newmarket, and lost it for love, lived to rear and give her country the most famous

fighting family in its history. To run away at twenty-five, and to die at eighty revered and adored by her sons, the Napiers—that was her lot, and it is matter for your hasty moralist to perpend. To know more of such a life must have been an ardent desire with a host of worthy readers. And all the while the letters she wrote to her most intimate friend, letters covering nearly all the years of her long life, were in the possession of Lord Ilchester's family! It is a striking reminder of a fact I have just now rejoiced at and bewailed—that thousands of profoundly interesting letters must lie unknown (at least to the world) in the libraries and lumber-rooms of old houses. Well, we have Lady Sarah's at last, piously exposed as they were written, and carefully annotated by the present Lady Ilchester and her son Lord Stavordale, and I for one am most deeply obliged.]

Not that the letters are very brilliant or witty, or that they clear up mysteries, or throw strong fresh lights on persons and events. The earlier are intelligently lively and humorous, and the later full of strong sense and wide benevolence—more than enough so to furnish yet another refutation



of the preposterous pretence of those vociferous modern ladies who will have it that capable and broad-minded women began with themselves. The writing is often curiously interesting for its own sake, and there is much to delight an interest in the persons and society of the time. But the first and chief value of the letters is that they give us an intimate knowledge of an attractive and instructive character, of an instructive and romantic history. Even readers who care nothing for the world I have spoken of may safely be recommended to these volumes if they care either for human character or for a significant story: they will find, I assure them, better entertainment here than in most of the silly romances they read in their thousands.

The letters begin with the matter most interesting to us in Lord Holland's memoir, printed now for the first time—the love of George the Third. Lady Sarah, whose parents died in her infancy, lived much with her elder sister Caroline, the lady who had eloped, very sensibly, as it turned out, with Mr. Henry Fox, afterwards Lord Holland, and so lived Lady Susan Fox Strangways, daughter of the first Lord Ilchester, the elder

son of old Stephen Fox. It was a gay and affectionate family party at Holland House in those days, but no doubt the atmosphere was of the world, worldly. It is no wonder that the passion visible in the young king enraptured Henry Fox and his wife, or that Lady Sarah, simple hearty girl of sixteen as she was, with most of her affections fixed on animals, was ready to be tutored how to be a Queen. There was never the least idea of anything left-handed, and the marriage of the king to the daughter of an English duke was by no means so much out of the way then as it would be thought now. Furious resentment would have been aroused in envious quarters, but there was no impossibility about the matter. Henry Fox, a shrewd and experienced man of affairs, evidently thought the chance a fair one. So Lady Sarah was coached how to behave towards her royal suitor—if such he should veritably be—as she writes to her friend. ‘I am allowed to mutter a little, provided the words *astonished*, *surprised*, *understand*, and *meaning* are heard. I am working myself up to consider what depends upon it, that I may *me fortifier* against it comes—the very thought of it makes me sick in my stomach

already.' We need not be concerned to rebuke her levity: she was to find out bitterly enough what passion really meant. At this time it was all an affair of a dazzling future and being a great personage, and when George was over-persuaded and gave up this desire of his youth she was more afflicted at the death of her squirrel. Naturally enough, however, she resented the slight and the double-dealing,—for George was still throwing out plain hints when his marriage with Charlotte of Mecklenburg must have been arranged,—but had the spirit to keep her feelings in the family, consenting to be a bridesmaid to the Queen. Naturally, also, she was inclined to recur to those tinsel possibilities in later life, and thank God—with a little human vanity—that she was not Queen, and at the end, with a gentler feeling, to pity the old man who like herself was blind.

The marriage with Sir Charles Bunbury was, as marriages go in the world, a suitable arrangement, and but for more than usual warmth in her heart and (it seemed) less than usual in his, would have gone well enough. She pleads guilty to 'giddiness,' but it is clear that they were fairly good

friends—and she most certainly was always loyal in what she wrote of him—until Lady Sarah found in herself capacity for something more. Followed the elopement with Lord William Gordon. It is not, as a rule, profitable to dwell on these cases, but here is an exception. Given the fact of two young people forgetting duty and experience in their passion—a fact about which an ethical disquisition would be out of place—what followed showed an admirable sense of conduct in every one concerned. One may almost say—if one may say it without offence—that it was a triumph of good sense and good breeding over unhappy circumstance. Lady Sarah set an example which, *mutatis mutandis*, might well be noted by the creators of unhappy heroines in our modern fiction, to say nothing of real life. Recovering herself after a brief time, she went to her brother's house and lived there, with other members of her family, or in the house he built for her in his park at Goodwood, for eleven years, in unaffected but strict retirement, bringing up her daughter, and otherwise interested in family affairs. Her husband, Sir Charles, had notoriously neglected her, and it is

alleged in a general way he had been a most unsatisfactory husband. But she herself never made the least attempt to excuse her conduct by any fault of his. She simply admitted that she had done him a great wrong, and was sincerely grateful for the kindness he and his family showed her child. Towards the world she maintained the same attitude of dignity and sense. It did not occur to her to rail at its 'injustice'; she recognised that she had broken its laws, and by those laws was in a sense beyond its pale. Consequently when ladies of her own class sought her society, she recognised frankly that they were doing her a favour, and since that was the case avoided those from whom a favour would be distasteful. So, too, she made up her mind that her daughter should be introduced into the world by another than herself. I daresay there are readers who will see in all this a humility abhorrent to their ideas of social freedom, but to my mind it is the right sort of pride. Lady Sarah knew perfectly well that she was not a tenth part as guilty as many women received everywhere, but she made no fuss on that account: she had known the way of the world and the consequences

of her act, and she accepted them. Sir Charles, again, showed a magnanimity which those who reverence him as a father of the turf must be pleased to observe. Marriage had not suited him, and he preferred a bachelor's life. He showed no animosity against his wife, and had the good sense not to call Lord William out. He divorced her in natural course; but he more than once went to see her afterwards in friendship—it was even rumoured (but Lady Sarah contradicts it) that he wished to remarry her. Her account of one such interview does, I think, some credit to both. ‘He said he saw no sort of reason why he might not see me just when he pleased, nor why he was to put me out of countenance. I could not *argue* that point with him, but I told him how glad I was that he could see me with such good humour, to which he answered, “Why should not I? You know I’m not apt to bear malice!” This set me into such a fit of crying again. . . .’ Her brother, too, the Duke of Richmond, and most of her family did what was right, neither shunning her nor insisting on the world receiving her, but simply taking her back into their midst. Surely, as I said,

even this part of the book is one to read with profit.

The letters are broken off for seven years after the elopement so far as we are concerned; whether they were lost or destroyed by Lady Susan appeareth not. We miss what light they would have thrown on her character in the most critical time, and we miss what she wrote of seven years socially interesting. When the letters recommence we find much of the old vivacity gone, and in its stead the sharp wisdom which comes of looking life in the face. With her marriage, four years later, to Captain Napier, began a new life for her, a life full of material anxieties, and even, her nurture considered, of hardships, but sustained with mutual trust and devotion. It was a marriage entered into deliberately, and after listening to all dissuasions, by two people who knew the world very well and were sure of themselves. It seems to have been one of uncheckered happiness, so far as husband and wife were concerned, until his death in 1804. For us it is enough to judge of its wisdom by its fruits. She was, indeed, 'a mother of men.' For twenty-two years after her husband's death she lived for

these sons and her daughters, who, all but one, died young—that one, Emily, oddly enough married a nephew of Sir Charles Bunbury—wisely and carefully educating them, indefatigably helping their careers, anxiously following their fortunes. But she was not exclusively absorbed in them. It was a personal age, and we need not desiderate in her great zeal for great principles; but through her connection with, and keen affection for, all the Lennoxes and Foxes and FitzGeralds—Lord Edward was her nephew—she had incitement enough for her sensible mind to play round politics and society, and not even the blindness of her later years made her a negligeable friend and adviser. A brave and truthful and loving soul, if ever there was one, this old lady, in whose youth had been such splendour and shame.

So much for a rough hint of Lady Sarah's own history and character. I come to what she says of famous people, and to some slight reflections she suggests about her world. An examination of her language, showing minutely the differences between a hundred years ago and now in the conversational style of the English 'upper classes,' would amuse the present writer



vastly, but I fear would bore my readers. Surely, though, they are interested in the history of slang? A word I have just used reminds me that Lady Sarah saw its useful birth, and has what should really be a *locus classicus* upon the fashionable slang of the period. 'I told you,' she writes in 1766, 'the word "boar" is a fashionable expression for tiresome people and conversations, & is a very good one & *very* useful, for one may tell anybody (Ld. G. Cavendish for example), "I am sure this will be a boar, so I must leave you, Ld. George." If it was not the fashion it would be very rude, but I own I encourage the fashion vastly, for it's delightful, I think; one need only name a pig or pork, & nobody dares take it ill but hold their tongues directly.' Spelling was rather muddled in those days, but whatever the etymology of the word it is odd it should have lost its porcine connotation. She goes on: 'To "grub up such a one" is also a new expression, which cannot be better illustrated to you than by supposing you were talking to Mr. Robinson, who diverted you very much, in comes the D. of York or Gloucester, & by sitting down by you "grubbs up" poor Mr. Robinson, perhaps for the

whole evening. The Dukes,' she adds unkindly, 'will either of them serve for an example of a boar too.' 'Lending a tascusa,' it appears, was a phrase (quite meaningless) for to snub. Grammar took its chance then as now: 'those sort' is regularly written by Lady Sarah. In the early high-spirited letters, 'oh Lords!' dot the pages, and 'who the d——l,' etc., denote a freer style than the 'middle-Victorian' young lady's—a freer style, to which, it is alleged, this generation has returned. 'Did you ever hear of such a toad as 'tis?' she asks, referring, by the way, to the Princess Augusta, sister of George III. Royalty was generally held in less awe then than it is now; but Lady Sarah, in addition to her private reason for dislike, was of course in the very thick of the Whig society, which made a point of despising the king and all his family. So when the Duke of Gloucester, the king's brother, fell in love with Lady Waldegrave, whom he married, although she was only Sir Edward Walpole's illegitimate daughter, Lady Sarah considered the match a poor one for her. 'What's more extraordinary is that she *appears* to be in love with him. I don't think it possible to be so really, &

he is not of consequence or rich enough to make it worth her while to feign it, I should think.' It is amusing to find that she had the same experience of a royal nurse in regard to the future George IV. as the Duke of Wellington had in regard to Edward VII. 'I went to see the little animal & I kissed it, for 'tis a beautiful, strong, handsome child, & my sister said it was wrong to kiss it, & the nurse reprimanded me for calling it child & said 'twas a fine young *prince*.' This baby, when he grew up, was to receive her praises as those of other expectant Whigs. He did her as Regent a kindly favour for one of her soldier sons, and did it with the gracefulness his worst enemies allowed him.

But more interesting than any royalty is the authentic likeness of Charles Fox, which smiles more than once in her letters. He was four years her junior, and, of course, as a girl, she looked on him with a protecting eye, and watched his growth into a brilliant youth with affectionate approval. He charmed her, as he charmed every one else, and she never mentions a fault in him without at once recurring to his merits. That Charles neglected his affectionate relations—I speak now of his manhood—who

naturally forgot that statesmanship and gambling take up a man's time, seems to have been a commonplace in his family. 'Can one expect any mortal to excuse his intollerable negligence? I don't love him a bit the less for it, because I know it's *the nature of the beast*, as my poor sister used to say, & I know him to be as capable of friendship & to have as good a heart as it's possible.' Even when Charles, in his ministerial days, failed to get Captain Napier a berth, Lady Sarah always found excuses for him. (It is odd that in an age of jobs Captain Napier, whose character and services really deserved promotion, for all his wife's powerful relations, was always passed over.) We have a sight of Charles frolicking with Mrs. Robinson—the Regent's famous Perdita—electioneering at Westminster and fighting his duel with Mr. Adam. So far from his seeking greatness, said Lady Sarah, 'greatness pursues him into gaming-houses.' But we have also a sight of Charles in his latter days, the devoted husband; and in his last illness, when 'the privy council of his heart are Ld. Holland'—his nephew, the host of Holland House in its greatest days—' & Mrs. Fox; with them he indulges I hear in low

or high spirits as he feels, sometimes crying, always tender & grateful to them for loving him so much, & never quite comfortable if they are not within call.' Of other famous people there is mention of *the* Duchess of Devonshire, over whose dissipations Lady Sarah (aged 32) moralises sadly, lamenting how that she 'dines at 7, summer as well as winter, goes to bed at 3, & lies in bed till 4: she has hysteric fits in a morning, & dances in the evening,' and so on. George Selwyn and his Mie Mie are mentioned at the happy moment when the child was given up to him, and Lady Sarah, like all who wrote letters at the time, shuddered at the murder of Miss Reay by Parson Hackman. But of the passion Lord Carlisle made such a coil of in his letters to Selwyn we hear nothing, and of him merely that his manners were charming, but that Lady Sarah 'can't help looking upon him as a school boy for the life of me.' I was sure he was a dull young man.

Lady Sarah's political views were those of her Whig relations, as I have said. But her own good sense tempered them now and then. She thought with her friends that George III. was utterly wrong in the American war, but she also thought the American

colonists were to blame as well. We, even those of us who are Tories, ought to remember that to most Englishmen of that date—which was half as near again as ours to the beginning of English settlements in America—this war was a domestic business in which it was quite fair to take, in theory, the side that pleased you, and that to many the Americans had seemed overwhelmingly in the right. It was the verdict, too, of capable Englishmen who served there, that the English Government could never hold the country against the Americans' will. Thus Harry Fox, returning in April 1779, 'laughed at the folly of supposing it.' But my point is that the affair was a domestic one, not in a true sense a foreign war: a certain comparison which has been made will not hold for a moment. Lady Sarah, if she used her own good sense, used also her own dear feminine nonsense, and 'I hate the King should conquer too, because he sits there at his ease at Windsor, and fancies he has nothing to do but to *order* to conquer such a place as America.' It was also her opinion that 'he uses poor dear Ireland so ill already that he don't deserve to keep it.' That was in 1775. Between '85 and the terrible '98 she

lived in Ireland, and was consistently bitter in her invective against the Government, charging it roundly in '97 with deliberately bringing on civil war to pave the way to the Union. Exaggeration of party feeling there is again, no doubt, but the evidence she gives of Government muddling and provocation is dismal reading. She was heart and soul with the oppressed Catholics, and had an intense admiration for Edward FitzGerald: 'He lived and died the most benevolent of mankind,' she writes. There is also an interesting word of Pamela in '93: 'I never saw such a sweet, little, engaging, bewitching creature as Ly. Edward is, & childish to a degree, with the greatest sense. The upper part of her face is like poor Mrs. Sheridan. . . . I am *sure* she is not *vile Égalité's* child; it's impossible.'

In the early letters there is much of the theatre and acting, as we should expect: it was almost a mania with English society at the time. A curious point in social history arises in regard to Mr. O'Brien, who ran away with Lady Susan Fox Strangways. He was apparently an actor by profession, and yet he seems to have met and played with the amateurs at Holland House on equal

terms: it seems odd for the period, for of course he had not, like Garrick for example, the prestige of success—which in all periods has appealed to English society. I forget, by the way, if it was this elopement that suggested to Thackeray his Lady Maria and O'Hagan, but in this case also the loving relations followed the beautiful instinct of human nature, and packed the wayward couple off to America. It is pleasant, though, to read that old Lord Holland, remembering, perchance, his own marriage, allowed his niece, Lady Susan, £400 a year when her father would give her nothing. Lady Susan was a woman of sense and spirit, refused, in the long-run, to stay in America, and managed to lead a perfectly happy life with O'Brien, who turned out an excellent man, at home. Her sisters, one gathers from the letters, showed a certain snobbishness over the matter, which, again, is odd for a time of really powerful aristocracy, refusing to be seen with her in public and so forth: the fact that the Foxes, after all, were only in their third generation may have had something to do with that. The student of feminine methods will find refreshment in this part of the correspondence. And the student—I



trust I am not alone—of even smaller things will find information to his heart about the influenza, dress, dinner hours, and habits of all sorts.

The first Lord Holland's memoir is now published for the first time, although both his grandson and the late Lord Holland had it in mind. We learn from it the detailed account of George III.'s almost definite proposal of marriage to Lady Sarah, an account confirmed in a memoir by her son, Henry Napier, gathered from talk with her and written nearly seventy years afterwards. Confirmed substantially, that is to say, for I think in Mr. Napier's account we find a bolder and more forward manner on her part, which does not correspond with her letters either, and is probably the exaggeration of old age. Apart from this, Lord Holland's memoir is interesting for a minute account of the beginning of George III.'s reign, and for a frank statement of the origin of his riches. That was known before, but it is agreeable to find Lord Holland indignantly explaining that all he did was to speculate in the Funds with the country's money lying in his hands as Paymaster, and that in doing so he used (of course) the judg-

ment of a man of sense only as to likely events. The second volume contains several interesting documents from the Holland House MSS. and elsewhere, the most interesting being an extract from Mrs. Charles Fox's journal recording the last days and death of her husband. It has not, I think, been quoted—certainly not published before. Few such accounts have been more touching than this of Charles Fox: his follies and ambition put by, his great brain at rest, and only his great affectionate heart left at the last. There are also two short papers by Lady Susan O'Brien, recording the changes she had seen in her length of days: she survived Lady Sarah Napier. They are brightly written, and make the time-honoured complaints of age, how that unmarried girls had more liberty, and so on; and they remark, with a touch of sarcasm, the 'refinements' in language. But—and here I end on the note I began with—Lady Susan O'Brien kept a journal. She was a clever and observant woman, knew the best of England, and lived in New York before the war of Independence: surely Lady Ilchester and her co-editor, who so clearly love those things, will give us this journal also.

## ANTHONY TROLLOPE

At a time when the security of our country's greatness seems, to the least imaginative mind, likely to call for a strenuous national effort urgently and soon, it is pleasant to contemplate the social English as they were in a quiet time, not our own, but not unfamiliarly remote. Consequently I have betaken myself to Anthony Trollope, an old and constant friend, and for months at a time almost my only reading in fiction. There was an essay in a magazine about him some time ago which I read with surprise and indignation. It had a Good Samaritan air towards a neglected unfortunate. It picked Anthony Trollope up, so to speak, and, having brushed him down, called the attention of passers-by to the fact that in spite of many unlucky deficiencies he was not altogether an unrepresentable object. It is the recollection of that essay that moves me to hazard one on my own account. I was surprised. That Anthony Trollope should be

neglected by the great mass of readers was likely enough. He was popular in his own day, because people recognised in him the accurate picture of their human and other surroundings. But few people care about accurate pictures of their fathers' surroundings, and his other qualities are not those which command popular success. His plots are not startling, and his language is quiet and unpretentious. But that a writer who had made a study of him should think him an object for affable encouragement was remarkable. I imagine that few students of fiction and few students of social history have not a better appreciation of his excellence and value.

To begin with his value for the history of manners, he is by far our greatest realist since Fielding. Miss Austen uniformly approaches him in her own field, but that field was a very much smaller one than his. George Eliot approaches him in some passages of some of her books, but in the rest she is in no way his competitor. Lovers of Dickens are apt to attribute to that great master of sentiment and caricature the perfection of every conceivable quality; but I hardly think the well-advised of them would

claim for him a literally exact portraiture of manners; and it is in that sense I am speaking of realism, putting any esoteric views there may be about a higher realism on one side. A comparison with Thackeray may perhaps help my estimate. Thackeray was by far Trollope's superior in the perception of the humours of life and in a humorous presentation of them, but in fidelity to the facts of life, or at least the facts which eye and ear tell one finally, he was by far Trollope's inferior. Thackeray would seize on a mode of eccentricity and exploit it to its full value, but even in this he would exaggerate for effect. Fred Bayham and Paul de Florac would be all the better for a little less exuberance. With commonplace people and incidents he was careless. Even when moralising in his own person, he could write, to take a trivial but conclusive instance, of a gentleman 'bawling out the odds he would give or take' on a racecourse. But you are defied to find in Trollope a remark or an action out of keeping with the character concerned. I would give a pound for every such instance found by an objector, if he would give me a penny for every strictly consistent speech or instance I

might find in return. One might go further than the mere details of speech and action, and compare these authors when they are dealing with the same significant situation in social or domestic life. An instance is the treatment of an unhappy marriage in *The Newcomes* and in *The Claverings*. Both Sir Barnes Newcome and Sir Hugh Clavering were hard and selfish men who misused their wives. And when due allowance has been made for the fact that Barnes Newcome was a cad and Hugh Clavering a gentleman, which is the more characteristic and the truer picture: Barnes Newcome swearing at his wife before servants and flinging sarcasms at her about nothing, or Hugh Clavering instinctively chilling his wife's affection with persistent and unstudied indifference and curt reasonableness? I have no doubt which of these *ménages* is the more human and interesting; the Newcome one is empty violence, and, as it were, abstract evil, and the Clavering a subtle exposure of conflicting temperaments. But on the point of realism only, remembering that Barnes was a snob, a slave to convention, and had married 'above him,' we must surely pronounce that his violence and causeless cruelty

are exaggerated; while Sir Hugh is natural throughout—merely a heartless man who was quite sure he was treating his wife fairly, and was right in chastening her sentimentality and ‘trash and nonsense.’ If it is added that all of us have met many Hugh Claverings and few of us a single Barnes Newcome, it might be replied that common experience is irrelevant, that the creation of an exceptional character might be the greater feat. But surely that is only the case if the exceptional character is true to itself. If you find Barnes Newcome ‘convincing’ or ‘inevitable,’ or whatever the proper phrase of criticism may be, there is an end of it. But at least it is a serious question if he be so, and there can be no question about Sir Hugh. Other parallels might be given, but I dislike finding fault with Thackeray; to me it always seems a sort of domestic treachery, like abusing one’s friends to strangers. Nor would it serve to make comparisons with Mr. Meredith. Characters portrayed with splendid realism he has given us, like Squire Beltham in *Harry Richmond*, far and away greater in profundity and effect than anything in Trollope. But Mr. Meredith is seldom a

realist, and his general absorption in psychology forbids the discursive panorama of life we find in Thackeray and Trollope; and, after all, no number of comparisons can prove the justness of my opinion. If, however, one is content to keep to the superficialities of life only, I think that no one will dispute Trollope's absolute and minute trustworthiness. It was amply endorsed by those who could test it by experience, and we may accept it without misgiving.

The æsthetic value of it, as an end in itself, varies of course with temperament. Merely to note small differences in the manners of the last generation from those of my own is to me a very great enjoyment, and the smaller, the subtler they are, so much the better. I can read carefully every word of the conversation at a dinner party in the palace at Barchester without a moment of weariness, however commonplace that conversation may have been. The little differences in modes of address, the existing point of view intellectually and morally, the social values and distances of this or that distinction in class—all this I love to ponder and carefully to compare with my memory of such commonplace conversations conducted



by the present representatives of the people in the book. This, as I said, is an end in itself. But the broader and more bravely soaring minds of other people, impatient of trivialities, would not necessarily waste their time in the same relaxation. These trivialities of manner and address, these intellectual and moral points of view held by commonplace people, imply many important facts of our social system, and the subtle changes in them may connote great changes to be gradually produced in that system. To take, for example, the changes in the intellectual and active importance of women in everyday social life: I do not refer to exaggerated and generally ineffective propagandism, but to the gradual changes which every experienced man or woman of the world acknowledges. Trollope's evidence on this point is of a very sound value, chiefly, in my opinion, because like all the other trustworthy records of the past, it is a corrective to exaggerated ideas about the former backwardness or present advance of women, but also because it shows in what ways the avowed attitude of women has changed, as it has changed. Or to take public affairs. Those of us who make it our business to study them, or hope haply some

day to influence their course, are necessarily dependent on current sweeping generalisations about the temperament and views and intellectual condition of our fellow-countrymen. Statesmen and politicians and publicists, those who speak and those who write about public affairs, are in this matter, necessarily for the most part, at the mercy of generalisations which may or may not be true, which appeal to their sense of probability, but which they cannot test. 'If there is one thing certain about the English people . . .' says the speaker or the writer; but does he really know this certain thing? Daily life, converse with different classes and sets of people, help to correct inevitable ignorance in those who avoid the disaster of getting into a socially narrow groove. And I maintain that Trollope's books are a most useful assistance, because by showing tendencies in development they very greatly increase the value of contemporary observation.

But of course the value of this realism, as a means and not as an end, is conditioned by its extent, and it has been alleged against Trollope that his scope is narrow, that he only deals with a section of the upper middle class—with parsons and civil service clerks.

The allegation is quite untrue. The chief male personages of most of his books are, to be sure, parsons and civil servants. If he had drawn no other characters than these, it is no narrow scope of observation which includes Bishop Proudie and Bishop Grantly, Archdeacon Grantly, Mr. Arabin, and Mr. Slope. Surely here are types of human nature and social tradition and moral and intellectual equipment sufficiently diverse? This same consideration holds in a less degree of his civil service clerks. Johnny Eames and Adolphus Crosbie, and the trio of *The Three Clerks*, with their colleagues and official superiors, make up a tolerably extensive fraction of humanity in its essentially different qualities and capacities. But his subsidiary persons in these clerical and civil service books come of many classes and types of training and character. It would be too long to give instances enough to establish my remark, but I cannot refrain from mentioning Mr. Sowerby, an original and brilliant study of a familiar result of changing social conditions. Moreover, there are other books; *The Claverings*, in my opinion, one of his very best, has little to do with parsons, and nothing with civil servants. Sir Hugh Claver-

ing and his brother Captain Archie, Count Pateroff, the inimitable Doodles and 'the man who dusted his boots with his pocket-handkerchief'—these distinct and different people are worlds apart from parsonages and Somerset House or Downing Street. And think of his gallery of women, prudes and coquettes, dowagers and adventuresses, bullies and slaves, beautiful and ugly! And remember that he has done several times what Thackeray hardly did once: he has drawn interesting, clever, and individual women who were also good and serviceable. All this array of characters is paraded in detail; you follow them in their rising up and going to bed, their businesses and pleasures and meals and love-affairs, their financial distresses—which no one but Thackeray in the case of Sir Francis Clavering has described with such minute knowledge and appreciation: modern novelists are all so rich—and their deaths and burials. A narrow field? It is as big as China.

So much of Trollope's value as a realist. But I am by no means minded to stop here. Dr. Garnett, whose study of Trollope in *The Dictionary of National Biography* is most exhaustive and appreciative, nevertheless

commits himself to the statement that 'he never creates—he only depicts.' It is an almost distressing instance of the modern taste for irresponsible paradox that so sound and scholarly a critic as Dr. Garnett should make this reckless assertion. The man who gave Mrs. Proudie to the world 'never creates'! It takes one's breath away. Whatever be the fate of Trollope's books generally, it is at least certain that Mrs. Proudie will live as one of the great creations of English fiction. So completely realised she is that thousands and thousands of unimaginative readers have known her as familiarly as they know their nearest relations; and she has not been known to them merely by phrases and peculiarity of manner, but in her full, vigorous character. To say that this is mere observation is really monstrous. Trollope never listened to the intimate colloquies of bishops and their wives, but who doubts the absolute truth of Bishop and Mrs. Proudie's? Dr. Garnett indeed directly contradicts himself on this point. 'His success in delineating the members of social classes, such as the episcopal, of which he can have had but little personal knowledge, is most extraordinary, and seems to suggest not merely

preternatural quickness of observation and retentiveness of memory, but some special instinct.' Trollope, as a matter of fact, had a considerable personal knowledge of clergymen, and, even if he knew but few bishops, had plenty to go upon in drawing them. But when a writer has produced such a character as Mrs. Proudie, seen all round and through and through, to say that he 'never creates' but has 'some special instinct' is to play with words. This 'special instinct' was an imaginative and sympathetic power of realising the complete characters of people whom either Trollope could only know in their outside aspects, or invented altogether: why this power should be distinguished from creative genius, or how the distinction is to be made, I must leave to subtler critics. But I should very much like to know in what way Mrs. Proudie is less of a creation than Becky Sharp, for I do not think Dr. Garnett would suggest that Thackeray 'only depicts.'

The fact is that the exact portraiture of manners—in which sense of realism I claimed that Trollope was a great realist—though his most valuable quality for history, is not his greatest gift in point of intellect. It was the gift readiest to his hand, and one with which



he was for the most part content. But when he chose, when the subject attracted him, when he took the trouble, he could go deeply into the sources of character. He wrote plainly; he hated any parade of philosophy; he would have scoffed at the word 'artist'; and it is true enough to say that he did not take his vocation of novel-writing very seriously. But it is not true that because a man does not take his work seriously therefore his work is not serious. One would, indeed, wish it were true—if only the converse were true also, and the multitude of contemporary mediocrities, who prate about their wonderful aims and inspirations, by virtue of their prating made themselves worth the trouble of reading. When Trollope went deeply into character, he did so not because he took his work seriously, but because the subject interested him. That does not matter; what matters is that he did go deeply into character on occasion, as Mrs. Proudie and her husband, as the persecuted Mr. Crawley, and as a dozen other results are extant to prove. It is done without parade, and, except perhaps in the case of Mr. Crawley, is done without an appearance of continued intention; but it is done all the same. With a few hints and sugges-

tions, with a few casual asides, Trollope has shown often that the whole nature of a type of human being is clear to him. It may be the case that the manner is not that of an artist—that it is rather that of a man of the world wishing to interest and fearful of wearying you; but none the less is the result most interesting, and respect for the knowledge and intellect which produced it most clearly due. Too much has been made of the fact that Trollope was regular in his habits and wrote so many words a day. It is a sign of the crude and unsympathetic character of our literary appreciation that we should be reminded of this fact whenever Trollope is mentioned. He had been trained to task-work and punctual habits, and he found them convenient. Why not? A man's intellect is not necessarily the worse because its working is not dependent on sunshine or rain, on the society he has been frequenting, on the thousand other irrelevant accidents of life. To be able to set them aside does not mean that a man is stupid, but that he is strong. A poet might not be able to do this. But Trollope's method is one of prose; it works with sound knowledge of life on the lines of reason. Imagination was needed too, and,



as I contend, he used it in full measure. But it does not follow that because he wrote so many words a day he had not previously thought out what he was going to write. The form of his work was sufficiently pedestrian to allow him to use what his gift of imagination had provided for him at such a time as he chose. That is all, and that is to his credit. There is no need to apologise for an intelligence because it is not only great, but alert and ready for use, nor any need to apologise for Trollope at all ; and I trust that my remarks may not be so interpreted.

## THE GREAT DUCHESS

WHENEVER, in my casual reading, I meet with even the slightest mention of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, I pause to offer her memory a silent salutation. I have just now read two rather large volumes about her, and it becomes necessary to me to break into articulate homage. It is an instinct with most of us to be struck (whether we are catholic enough to admire or not) by the spectacle of any person wholly and absolutely consistent with himself and with some simple elemental law of his being. Now I know of no man or woman in history who, on anything like a large scale and with recognisable strength of will and action, is at all comparable to Sarah Jennings for unity of life and feeling. In her slightest aside and most vehement speech, in her least and her greatest actions, the same spectacle is presented to my admiring vision—a procession of strong unfaltering, straightforward, frank, remorse-

less, heartless selfishness. She was a perfect expression of egotism, without compromise or exception—a type, an example for ever. The moralist may say this or that, but the artist cannot choose but applaud.

It is not my purpose to 'review' Mr. Fitzgerald Molloy's Life of her which I have just read. (He calls it *The Queen's Comrade*, in which title I doubt poor Queen Anne would have seen irony or cynicism.) But it would be less than civil not to thank him for much material new to me, and to compliment him on the pleasant manner of its presentment. To people who have not made a study of the sort of thing the book should be both illuminative and interesting, and an excellent corrective, so far as it goes, in regard to Revolution times of that arch-manipulator of truth, Lord Macaulay. To me, who knew something of the subject, it was an increase of detailed knowledge and a confirmation of opinion. The latter very decidedly, especially as regarded Sarah Jennings. In every fresh detail she was the same as I had always seen her, never swerving to the right or the left, grasping everything with her strong hands, and striking hard with them if she were thwarted—old friends, old benefactors,

her own children: it was all one to her. A perfectly consistent woman.

You can express her life with the simplicity and finality of a problem in Euclid. The theory which guided her throughout, and which I will not believe could have been less than half-conscious, was clearly this: that the world was created for the benefit of Sarah Jennings; that those who aided this wise design of Providence by advancing her fortunes, heaping money and titles on her, and so forth, were simply doing their duty, and deserved neither return nor any feeling of gratitude on her part; that those who ceased so to do, or who were indifferent, or who did the opposite, were wretches for whom no punishment could be too severe: they were thwarting the nature of things. There is something almost impersonal in the even, unhesitating retribution with which she pursued any one who had crossed or offended her in the slightest degree; such a person was an undoubted reptile, and when it raised its head—when ever or wherever—Sarah Jennings hit at it. And, mark, there was very little cant of self-righteousness about all this. She was not like Queen Mary II., who, whenever her treachery

to her father had been brought home to her, went and congratulated Heaven on her virtues in her diary.

No misconduct, you may be sure, was ever brought home to the mind of the Duchess of Marlborough. When Queen Anne finally dismissed her, the Duchess simply excused herself for ever having put up with the society of such a creature as her Sovereign. 'I am afraid,' she wrote to Sir David Hamilton, 'you will have a very ill opinion of one that could pass so many hours with one I have just given such a character of; but though it was extremely tedious to pass so many hours where there could be no conversation, I knew she loved me.' You see the kindness had been all on the Duchess's part, not on the Queen's, who had endured all kinds of affronts in the last reign, because she would not part with her favourite, and since her accession had heaped every benefit she could on the Duchess. Of course Sarah had given her Sovereign a direct piece of her mind before her dismissal, in terms even then, when English people were far less obsequious to Royalty than they are now, very much out of the way, but not as one defending herself, rather as one painfully

pointing out a child's naughtiness. To say that she did not blame herself for the rupture is to understate the truth; in her mind no conduct of hers, whatever it was, could justify a revolt against her. With the same beautiful and, I do not doubt, sincere simplicity, when she had to leave England, she bewailed the necessary ruin of a country which had ceased to pay the Duke and her ninety thousand a year. There was no cant in this; it flowed inevitably from her theory of life.

For the expression of this theory—and it was surely a fine theory to live with—Nature had been kind to Sarah Jennings and us. It had given her every quality necessary to make it clear to our edification. To begin with, she was only passionate when her interests were concerned, not otherwise. People who are passionate in their love affairs may be selfish, but their selfishness is superficially obscured now and then by an apparent regard for the other person. Sarah Jennings escaped that obscurity. Moreover her coldness of blood, in that regard, probably ministered to the extreme uxoriousness of the Duke, lasting from young manhood to old age. Wherever he was, cam-

painging or not, he sent her constant letters of devotion, and was lucky, it seemed, if he escaped a douche of criticism in return. He mentions a 'kind' letter of hers as something extraordinary. No one could throw stones at the Duchess on the score of her morals, in the usual sense of the term, so that she was invulnerable to the general criticism of English moralists; in fact, I venture to think they ought to acclaim her as a 'good woman.' But her husband could not stand against her theory; she could not curb her indignation with Anne for taking a new favourite, and so give him a chance of keeping his places. It is not an extended selfishness that we contemplate in Sarah Jennings; it is the real thing; self with her meant self.

Again, she had a splendid constitution, a strong will, and a good head; necessary qualities, because if she had been ailing, weak, or a fool, her selfishness might have been just as complete, but it would not have been so fine a spectacle for us. Also she was naturally frank and straightforward. Had she been more inclined to subterfuge and double-dealing she might, it is true, have had even greater success in life, but her



memory would not be so finely simple to appreciate. She was not an intriguer. She felt it due to her theory of life to march straight to her goal and seize on what she wanted in the eye of the world. Of course she dropped people who had ceased to be useful to her, but openly and as a natural consequence. When James's cause was hopeless she dropped him; it was his fault that he could no longer promote and enrich her husband, and so he forfeited her patronage. It is really misleading to call such plain-dealing as that treachery. The great successes in her life were due to her influence over Anne, and that was gained by no flattery or intrigue, but by the frank imposition of a strong will on a weak one. Anne became her creature and took her orders. When Anne had revolted and that source of power was gone, even then she did not intrigue. She made one straightforward threat, to publish the letters of 'Mrs. Morley' to 'Mrs. Freeman.' It was rather like blackmailing, to be sure, and no doubt the Duchess thought it hard that Providence should drive her to such means to her just ends, but it was not intriguing. Nor, in the absence of direct evidence, do I believe that she coquetted



between St. Germain and Hanover as her husband did. He was a born intriguer, a man natively underhand, but it was not her way at all. She did not plot to bring people into power; when they were in power she went to them and demanded everything they had to give. Moreover, she honestly disliked St. Germain, and was true to her dislikes. Fairly consistent in an age of turncoats, fairly truthful in an age of liars, and very strong in an age of weaklings—her good qualities in this kind all minister to the supreme effect of her life.

Accident and circumstance as well as natural qualities conspired to bring her theory into relief. If she had been successful without interruption, had never met with a rebuff, we should have missed the sublime spectacle of her indignation, of her wrath with those who had defied the right order of the universe. The first rebuff came with William and Mary. Mary hated Lady Churchill, a fact which Lady Churchill was very slow to grasp. But when she did grasp it, and the fact that she and Lord Churchill had little to hope for from the new Court, she said very forcible things. Other people were disappointed as well. It is, indeed,

rather refreshing to observe the indignation of the patriots who had brought in William of Orange when they perceived that he preferred his Dutch minions, the Bentincks and the Keppels, to his English traitors, driving the latter from his presence that he might get drunk in peace with the former. The Princess Anne said things about him which we may fairly trace to the more trenchant style of her favourite—'Caliban' and 'the Dutch monster' I am sure were phrases of Sarah Jennings. But Sarah was generous; those who sinned against her had to be punished all their lives, but her just wrath stopped short at the grave. 'When the King came to die,' she beautifully wrote, 'I felt nothing of that satisfaction which I once thought I should have had upon this occasion . . . so little is it in my nature to retain resentment against any mortal (however unjust he may have been) in whom the will to injure is no more.' Surely a grand passage! But familiarity with the injustice of kings did not prevent this great woman from taking infinite pains to punish humble people. When Sir John Vanbrugh had the temerity to criticise her she 'was very sorry I had fouled my fingers

in writing to such a fellow'; but, mindful of her duty to the world, she took the trouble to fill thirty sheets of paper with charges against Sir John.

In her old age, indeed, she found time to do a good deal of polemical writing against her enemies. Among other such efforts she wrote an elaborate account of her daughters' misconduct towards her, and sent the agreeable brochure to various friends and relations. 'Having boare what I have done for so many years, rather than hurt my children, I hope nobody will blame me now,' etc., etc. Also she dictated to Hooke her famous *Account of her Conduct*, and composed with Henry Fielding her *Vindication*. (What would one not give to have heard these two geniuses in consultation!) Her vindication, it need hardly be said, took the form of exposing the wickedness of other people rather than of defending herself. . . . But I protest that as I think of this splendid old woman, bed-ridden at last and so near her end, still indomitable, still strong in thought, and still keenly humorous, I feel sympathy for her human qualities rather than admiration for her superhuman perfection. But that is a sentimental weakness and must be sup-

pressed. An artistic wonder and joy in the contemplation of life and character absolutely thorough, absolutely true to itself—that must be one's emotion when one reads of Sarah Jennings, Duchess of Marlborough.

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## TWENTY YEARS SINCE

It is often complained that the world of ideas and of art has been for many years a rather dull place. The complaint may be well or ill founded. If the accepted view of the relations of art and ideas to national life and events be right the complaint is odd, for no one can deny that national and political events have been stirring and that the signs of more stirring events to come can be read by the naked eye. In England, at least, the national stress and national emotion which are held to inspire poets and philosophers have not been lacking. We have had to pull ourselves together, and we have had a grim proof that we may not relax again speedily. We have had much to hearten us. South Africa has proved that our manhood is as spirited and enduring as ever. It has proved, too, that our boasted civilisation in tenderness for the weak and conquered is not a sham; that, on the contrary, we are ready to prolong our own suffering and loss



for its sake. On the other hand, we have been fairly and squarely warned that the world, as it goes now, calls for mental as well as moral qualities in the nation that is to win. We cannot afford our cherished stupidity; we must seek for and use our brains. And in the future it is plain we shall have to act strongly and together, that our indifferentism and individualism must go by the board. We have to see to it that the ties of sentiment which bind our colonies to us shall be strengthened by ties of common interest, and not loosened by any folly of theorists, and we shall have to hold this great Empire well together, against the attacks, in one way or another, of the rest of the world. In fact, we have been, and shall have to be in infinitely greater degree, on our mettle. All this, surely, ought to have something to say to ideas and to arts. Will it? It remains a question; so far the response, if in one or two quarters brilliant, has been slight. But we must remember that the national consciousness of all this has existed, if it yet exists, but a short while, and it is the national consciousness and not the beliefs of one here and one there, which calls to art to express it when the theme is a

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great one. The right appealing idea and the perfect form are still to seek; let us pray they may be found.

Meanwhile, if in our art or our ideas we have been dull, we have been dull with differences. I was reminded very strongly of such differences the other day in reading again Mr. Mallock's *New Republic*. Certainly those of us who talk about art and philosophy and society, talk differently now from Mr. Mallock's talkers. In fact, the change at first sight is almost amazing. Every one admits that this book is a very accurate statement of the ideas of Mr. Matthew Arnold, Dr. Jowett, and Mr. Pater, and so forth: everybody admitted it at the time the book was published. It was said that the people were all portraits, but the truth is that they represent the writings and not the conversation of their prototypes. One or two, I know from credible evidence, were not in the least like their supposed originals, and Mr. Mallock was, of course, aware of this. He simply took certain distinguished people and made them talk like their books. He did not design to be realistic, nor, I fancy, dramatic either. The affair gives one no illusion of real conversation; no one out of a pulpit or

off a lecture platform could talk like these eloquent theorists. But the point is that the conversation does represent, and very accurately—given a trifle of satire and caricature—the ideas which were in the air and influenced the talk of cultivated people at the time, and was taken, and rightly taken, to express the particular ideas and deductions from the ideas of the celebrated men in question. For my part, when I first read it some fifteen years ago, being young, I hailed it as a gospel, or rather as several gospels, to enliven by turns. And how old-fashioned it all seemed the other day! Not that it was stale, withered, and of intolerable entrails; it is far too well done for that, and far too sympathetic, as belonging to one's youth. But with what pleasant smack of the past it returned. Old ideas, old enthusiasms! I protest it smelt sweetly of lavender.

It is worth while—since at least it is agreeable to the writer—to consider the matter more particularly. The general setting need not detain one; people still have house parties and lunch and dine. Nor need the supernumerary characters. The host, the young man who his friends think ought to do something great, because in spite of being

very rich he liked to talk about books, and who never does, is a constant type in real life. Leslie, the young man who conceals a breaking heart by rather violently cynical remarks, is perhaps a trifle more of books than of life, and we do not take him quite so seriously as they did in the eighties; he dated, even then, from a misunderstanding of Byron. Lady Ambrose, the rich woman whose delight is in duchesses, would nowadays be less rigid in her judgment about people's 'infidelity' and all that, but—some of us would say—decidedly more vulgar. Miss Merton is merely the hint of a character which might or might not have been interesting if it were worked out.

But Dr. Jenkinson and Mr. Herbert and Mr. Saunders and Mr. Luke and Mr. Rose—one might write a volume about the most superficial delivery of any one of them, to explain what changes in tone and thought and feeling it records for us. Of course, they are sometimes caricature. Mr. Saunders, for example, who was always denying anything except progress 'which could be verified by statistics,' and who had 'disproved the existence of God,' is a bit more powerful than the militant atheist of the period could really

have been. But the militant atheist was—that is the point—and is no more. How many years is it since he was heard in the land? There are many men, no doubt, who agree with Mr. Saunders about God, though few intelligent men may agree with him about progress; there are many, that is to say, who are not merely agnostic, but repudiate the possibility of anything approaching to any notion of theism, and believe all ‘faith’ to be not only foolish but noxious. But even they do not trouble themselves to contradict or hold forth; they do not think it worth while. Twenty years ago they did; they wanted to convert the rest of the community. It seems, indeed, to pass from extreme instances, as though the whole war between faith and philosophy had collapsed. The armies march their own ways, through different countries, and if haply the soldiers of either meet, they bivouac together in peace. The quarrel between statesmen and ecclesiastics, from time to time acute in France and Italy, is social and political, not one of belief and disbelief. In England the national genius for compromise produced the Broad Church—and Dr. Jenkinson. But the compromise was found to be unnecessary,

or impracticable, and the Broad Church is defunct. I wonder if any dignitary of the Church or eminent philosopher is engaged on a work to reconcile Christianity and Science. I imagine not. It is all as dead as Robert Boyle, who began it two centuries and a half ago. We have agreed that there are different sorts of intellect, and they have given up, almost with mutual respect, the attempt to convert each other. Mr. Mallock's Dr. Seydon, whose zeal was all for coalescing the Anglican and Eastern communities, is a more modern figure than Dr. Jenkinson, who thought that Christianity 'really embraces all religions, even any honest denial of itself.' But it is rather a large change for twenty years, and was not, I believe, anticipated then. I doubt if there is a single man in England now at all entitled to be called a philosopher or a man of science, who cares what dogmas the mass of people believe, or a single churchman of repute who would try hopefully to convert him.

But were this militant spirit to revive, it would find its objective very much changed. The anxious reconciler of Christianity and Science would find no longer stubborn and rude opposition in the enemy's camp, but he

would find what he would like far less. He would find himself treated like a child, his arguments listened to, and the briefest reply consistent with courtesy. His listeners would be of opinion that his mind, however equipped with learning and accomplishment, lacked a certain faculty, and would try to change the conversation. This is not to speak offensively: I write as an observer only—but I am sure that thus, and not otherwise, would the men of science conduct themselves. A complete rejection of the old dogmas is none the less real because it is not vociferated. But the militant atheist, could he be born again, would be just as much annoyed as Dr. Jenkinson. For while the philosophers and a very large proportion of all educated men would tell him that his attacks on religion were not worth while, he would find also that among the general there was far more profession of dogma, far more mysticism and delight in symbols of faith, than in his day. He would say that a wave of obscurantism had passed over the country. Reason and logic he would find, however unobtrusively potent with the educated, were certainly not, as he had thought they would be, ruling in the market

place. So it is. The philosopher's attitude to Christianity, as to one of many religions historically interesting or socially important, but without relation to fact or probability, is that of many who, when *The New Republic* was published, would have been struggling with reason and tradition: but also faith, Catholicism, mysticism—call it what you will—is stronger numerically now than then. Between the two, the Broad Church and Dr. Jenkinson have fallen. It is astonishing now to the unhistorically minded to read of the famous struggles and heart searchings of an earlier generation. Pathetic, if we understand them rightly, but difficult so to be understood.

Then Matthew Arnold, who on his culture and 'sweetness and light' side is very fairly expressed in the book, is not he, too, fallen? On that side only, I think. The classical poet of *The Scholar Gipsy* lives, and even his biblical criticisms, his *Literature and Dogma*, remain as a stage, at least, of an intellectual procession, a work which in its time had a large effect. But was ever 'movement' more futile than Matthew Arnold's crusade of 'culture'? It was, in fact, foredoomed to futility. To enlarge the culture of the



cultivated, to lead them where they shall find useful food and widening of vision, is an attempt of which the success is according to the power of him who attempts it. To show those who crave culture where they may find its beginnings, is the successful endeavour of him who has the teaching genius. But to rail at the uncultivated, to preach the advantages of culture with a view of enticing those who do not even understand the preacher's language—that is a proceeding on which no success awaits. If you explain to those who have an instinct and a desire for culture, how beautiful a thing it is, you are superfluous; if you explain it to those who have no such instinct or desire, they will not understand you. First it is necessary to wake the instinct or implant the desire. There may be more than one way of doing this. Every way must be difficult, and can be found only by inspiration or by infinite pains. But the way of bullying is most certainly a hopeless way. It implies, too, the fault it seeks to correct. If you wish to improve the manners of an ill-mannered man, and by way of doing so first call him opprobrious names and then draw his attention to your own superiority, he

can make a tolerably obvious retort, and whether he makes it or not, he is hardly likely to be impressed, to tremble and turn and be changed. To express a plain disgust for the mass of your fellow-countrymen, and claim for an infinitesimal minority a monopoly of social merits, is not likely either to convert the former or to improve the latter. And, in fact, the effect has been nothing. The really cultivated gained nothing. The uncultivated—those of them who heard anything of the matter—were merely annoyed. The sham cultivated were confirmed in their own conceit, and certain misleading phrases—Barbarians, Philistine, and so forth—remain for the misuse of journalists. And that is all. But twenty years ago many people thought that this crusade of Matthew Arnold was to work such miracles in social life as he declined to accept in theology.

Matthew Arnold is very fairly represented in *The New Republic*, given, of course, the touch of satire which came, and comes still, naturally to the author. I imagine that Mr. Mallock did not intend to give us Mr. Pater with the same verisimilitude. Mr. Rose's complacent and languid eulogies of life for art's sake are not to be fairly paralleled in

his writings. I often think that even his admirers do Mr. Pater an injustice, from the inveterate habit of giving every man a label and never more than one. Mr. Pater was labelled a master of style, and so hardly any one was able to see that this style clothed a coherent, and by no means an unmanly, philosophy. This philosophy assuredly did not recommend its disciples to sever themselves from the common life of their country: Mr. Pater was too really Greek for that heresy. Nor, apart from that, would the charming folly of Mr. Rose's ideas be fair, in point of intellect and imagination, to the artist who did in very truth widen the culture of his time, by showing it a mode of reconstructing, valuing, and living in the past in its way unique. Nor, again, have I gathered from his friends that Mr. Pater talked like Mr. Rose. But Mr. Rose is a very fair caricature, sometimes a very fair portrait of a school, of a 'movement,' which found its best inspiration in Mr. Pater—and this, probably, was Mr. Mallock's intention. Well, that movement also is gone from among us. For my part, I regret it a good deal. At its best it made a genuine appeal to detachment of appreciation in the arts,

and even in its popular effect it produced something better than preceding ugliness. In some of its professions it was false, no doubt. It was not 'Greek,' nor even like the Italian or French Renaissance—not in the least. Plato and Aristotle alike would have regarded its ideal of a life apart from the State, solely devoted to artistic enjoyment, as something monstrous and horrible, and in the Italy of the Renaissance artists were active artists, and their patrons statesmen. In this remoteness and exclusiveness it shared the fault of Matthew Arnold's movement, a fault fatal to vitality. But beside its advantages of being both charming in some respects, and amusing in others, it had the indirect advantage of varying the monotony of English life and ideals. From being notoriously a nation of humours and eccentricities, we English seem to be becoming all exactly like one another, and the man whom we all try to be, and many of us are, is a man incessantly talking about sports and games, and devoting the chief energies of his body and mind to their pursuit. I do not depreciate their value. All men need exercise, and some men need violent exercise. But the monotony is tedious, and, moreover,

it is a handicap to us as a nation. The fanatical eulogists of 'athletics' have persuaded themselves, heaven knows how, that our Empire was won by sports and games. If they will kindly go over in their minds the lists of our greatest statesmen, soldiers, sailors—to say nothing of our poets and philosophers—and observe how many conformed to their own idea of the perfect Englishman, they may conceivably observe their mistake. The fact is that our greatest men have been as unlike that boasted hero, 'the average athletic Englishman,' as it is possible to imagine. This by the way. The 'æsthetic' movement, an extreme on the other side, was a useful counterpoise and variety, and as I read of its beginnings in *The New Republic*, I sighed for its passing.

Out of all this change—slight in itself, perhaps, but remarkable for the brevity of the time—I find persons in the book whose ideas have sustained or increased their potency. The first is the old uncle, in whose classical villa the scene is laid. He, or his memory—for you remember he is dead—would be merely part of the background if it were not for the pages his nephew reads from his memoirs. One set of pages is an ironical recommendation of Christianity on

the ground that its prohibitions have added to our humour, and made our vices the more enjoyable. The other set form a vigorous satire, brilliantly imitated from Aristotle's *Ethics*, against British snobbishness (I trust an apology is needed for refreshing your memory). The partial and wicked truth of such a recommendation of course continues to be true, and so—alas!—does the truth of the satire. If old Mr. Lawrence had lived another twenty years, he would have noticed, to be sure, that there are differences in our snobbishness, as for example that we value titles less and money more, and he might have observed also that a larger number of people—in the greater uncertainty of our social hierarchy—are content to take out the national characteristic in contempt of sets and coteries not their own. But these are trifles. Otherwise the deceased Mr. Lawrence remains truer for our time than most of the advanced folk who stayed in his house. The value of him, however, is literary and not historical.

The other person in the book whose doctrine, as then presented, has not lost its force, but, on the contrary, makes a warmer appeal to us is—some of my readers may be

surprised to learn—Mr. Herbert, who stands for Mr. Ruskin. We are not concerned with his criticism of art, which has now been rejected by the experts. Though (by the experts' leave) his criterion of morality for the judgment of art was not so much radically false as narrow in his own connotation of it—for that the greatest art has been concerned with the genius of races and ages, and is, therefore, not a mere affair of arrangement of lines and colours, is surely a tenable view—still his criticism was narrow and inadequate, and it has passed away. It does not come into *The New Republic*. There we have Mr. Ruskin in two aspects—in his fierce denunciation of certain features of contemporary civilisation, and in his sympathy with the unequal lot of the poor. I think that in both these aspects he would meet with a far better understanding and a far more extensive agreement than he met with when *The New Republic* was written. He would have to rise from the grave to meet with it, because we do not read the books of his period. But if he could do that, and talk to us in lecture-rooms, and write to us in our Reviews, I am sure we should know what he meant far better than his contemporaries.

When Mr. Mallock wrote his first book, modern civilisation was still cock-sure of its virtues. Its critics were, one and all, regarded as eccentrics and dealers in paradox. Hardly any one doubted that swiftness of communication, extension of commerce, and all that, were of the essence of civilisation, even if they were not the whole of it. The great leaders of commerce gazed upon their new hideous houses, patted their capacious stomachs, and were convinced that they were the flower of all the ages. Thackeray had laughed at soldiers as an ornamental anachronism. The men of science crowed over discovery as though it were the same thing as understanding. The quality of towns did not matter; the great thing was that you could get from one to another ten times as quickly as your ancestors. You might have nothing better in your head than the latest price of corn, but being able to communicate this fact to a man thousands of miles away in a few minutes, you were a finer example of civilisation than Plato. In England, twenty years ago, we were hardly beginning to come to the end of our national monopoly of commercial prosperity; naturally we thought a merely material civilisation



the best possible. The corresponding virtues, repression of violence, free scope for enterprise, and also for cunning, and 'respectability,' which is the universal cloak of cunning, had it all their own way. Mr. Ruskin laid his finger on the weak spots in all this. But we did not wince, we merely grinned at him. Then he waxed angry, and accused our civilisation of ruining all that was fair and wholesome; he pointed to our factory chimneys shutting out the sun, and the pale faces of our factory hands. There was a murmur of surprise, because our manufacturers had been taught by Messrs. Bright and Cobden that *they* were the people, and that it was only wicked aristocrats and landowners who were oppressors. But few cared. . . . Now it is different. Seeing the results of our material civilisation for ourselves, its monotony and dreariness, the insipidity and vulgarity of the men it makes wealthy, and the excessive toil and emptiness in the lives of the men whose labour is the means, we begin to have our doubts. We find that the promised blessings of peace and universal goodness have not been secured, and that the incidental evils which were to pass away have grown and grown. Are we,

after all, on the wrong lines? Many of us think so; many more now, than twenty years ago, agree with Mr. Ruskin.

We have a stronger social reason than we had then for feeling that the lot of the poor—the labour which leaves no time nor energy for civilised recreation, and the pay which only just supports a tasteless life—is grievously unequal. The process which in this country is substituting, in the position of the main holders of wealth, for a class which had traditions of its own and had been there, so to speak, since our national memory a class which has risen in the immediate past by the exploitation of labour or by successful cunning—this process had, of course, been going on for a very long time when *The New Republic* was written. But the last twenty years have seen a rapid acceleration of it. The philosophical difference may not be great. It may not, philosophically, matter to the unlucky man whether the lucky one is 'the tenth transmitter of a foolish face,' or the first transmitter of a bulging pocket. Imaginatively it does matter to him, and we who, perhaps, are in neither category are more apt than twenty years ago to sympathise

with him. So when we read Mr. Herbert's strictures on his cultured audience for thinking only of themselves, for taking no thought of the poor in their 'new republic,' and for calmly accepting the results of others' labour, we find ourselves less surprised than they were. We feel that there is even less essential difference between poor and rich than there was, and understand better the former's discontent. Mr. Herbert's exhortations to preserve the belief in a future life in order to keep up the spirits of the poor in this one, has a keener ring in its sardonic irony than it had then.

I have written a dull essay on a lively book. But that is the way of comment. We go to the dull books when we want to make fun. I have simply written down these notes of differences, of decay, and growth, as they struck me. I will leave them as they stand, their connection unexplained, their central idea undeveloped. It is not worth while to do more, for all these 'movements' and phases are but fag-ends of a national principle which has well-nigh exhausted itself. If the race is taking a fresh start there will be movements of better worth. If it is not, heaven help us.

## THE PARADOX OF THE JEW

THE poor Jew fasted or ate dry bread when he could not get meat which had been duly killed; the rich Jew eats meat unclean to his fathers because the other is not served at the Savoy Hotel. The poor Jew bound his phylacteries round his arm in the sight of the heathen; the rich Jew is ashamed of the Day of Atonement. The poor Jew gloried in his race when it was most despised and rejected; the rich Jew—now that no one but a fool in this country despises his race—changes his name and hopes to be taken for a Scotchman. The poor Jew clung to his heritage though the world battered him; the rich Jew gives it up to win a contemptuous smile. The poor Jew was a strenuous man, worthy in the main, despite his faults, of a glorious past; the rich Jew is a sham, barely worthy of an ignoble present. That is the paradox of the Jew.

I speak of rich Jews living now in England, and I add at once that I do not speak

of them all. That many, and some of them the most honoured names among them, are as proud of their race as the poorest refugee from Russia, I am well aware. But my antitheses are true of a large and increasing number of prosperous English Jews, and at least as far as they are concerned it seems to me a miserable ending to a noble struggle, a feeble unnecessary abandonment of a cause that has been sustained with almost incredible heroism. I write as a Gentile whose imagination has for long been stirred by this wonderful history, who has admiration and sympathy for the best racial qualities of the Jew, and who is anxious to disclaim both ignorant prejudice and ridiculous patronage. It is as an admirer of the best that I take leave to be distressed by the degenerate, not by those who have avenged the faults produced by persecution on the Gentile world, the money-lenders and their like, but by those who in prosperity and without compulsion have done to the Gentile world a mean obeisance.

More brilliant pens than mine have written of the great men, poets, musicians, statesmen, philosophers, whom in all ages the Jewish race has given to humanity. But it

is to my purpose to write a few words about the race in general, its history and qualities. It is surely as wonderful as the Greek. The Greeks, in a flash of the world's history, reached the pinnacle of abstract thought, and wrote and sculptured art of an imperishable perfection, and in another flash their genius was gone. The Jews through two thousand years of oppression preserved an ideal of faith and an ideal of family life, and in the end were still the same, indomitable. There is no useful comparison to be made, but to my mind—while I feel Greek poetry to be part of my inheritance, and regard the Jews from the outside—the moral miracle is more wonderful than the intellectual. It is easier to excite and improve intellect than it is to implant and sustain morality. The mind of man, in this age or that, in this country or that, has shot up in rare examples. But a whole race wandering over the earth in poverty and hardship, not yielding an inch of its ancient custom, keeping to itself and reproducing itself unchanged, and with it all cheerful, good-natured, wise and kindly in its family relations, lettered and civilised when the nations that hemmed it in were barbarous, yet never emasculated

—that fact is unique. It is a triumph of character over circumstance more wonderful to my mind than any triumph of intellect over nature. Can there really be a member of that race who with no fear of persecution before him is ashamed to belong to it?

There is another side to the picture, no doubt. We are all familiar with the common charges against Jews; that they cringe in adversity and swagger in prosperity, that they are mean and sharp-dealing, and physical cowards. When we have duly remembered that there are good and bad members of every race we find still some considerable truth in the charge. It is customary to explain their vices by persecution, which may be a good explanation, but is a poor excuse, for we must take people as we find them, and anybody's vices could be accounted for by antecedents if we only knew them. It is more to the point to remark that these vices, servile as they are in appearance, do not as a rule mean servility in the Jew; he still instinctively and (in England now) unreasonably regards himself as the world's victim, and believes that all arts are justified against it; he is a conscious actor when he cringes and has a high con-

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tempt for those on whom he fawns, which feeling may not increase his amiability in your eyes, but at least preserves his self-respect. But to take the Jew with this reputation upon him: your rich English Jew of to-day must know well that any fair-minded Englishman will individually accept him on his merits. The exceptions to these faults are too numerous for any intelligent observer to predicate the faults of any unknown Jew. We all, if we know any Jews at all, know those who are independent and generous and good fellows. And the Jew can point if he will to virtues of his race, outside the toughness and miraculous patience and moral courage which have preserved it—virtues common among them, and quite enough to set against those faults. He can point to the intelligence of Jews, to their good nature, their sense of humour, their geniality. He can point to their *savoir vivre*, to the old saying that the Jew is neither a drunkard nor a teetotaler, to their support of one another, to their primitive virtues as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers. Or does he blush because Ikey Mo is a fund of laughter? Then he is an ass, for Paddy from Cork and Taffy and M'Phairson



are all laughed at in turn, foolishly but good-naturedly, by the Englishman to whom there is always something absurd in not being English.

But if these trivial temptations to the prosperous Jew to dissimulate his Judaism were a million times stronger, it would still amaze me that any Jew can wish to forego his heritage in the history of his race. How can he remember that the prayer his grandfather, or even his father, said on the eve of every Sabbath was said before the Captivity and said ever since, and then wish to dissociate himself from it all? I allow for the advance of thought, and know that it may be impossible to a Jew to accept the creed of his fathers. But after all, that creed in its essentials is simply a broad theism, with the addendum that a particular race was chosen to express the will of God upon earth, and remembering how many scholars can still accept the far more complex dogmas of Christianity, I find it hard to believe that the ordinary stockbroker is intellectually convinced that Judaism is untrue. True that its ceremonialism is involved and irksome, but still that ceremonialism is intimate and kindly; it sanctifies the joys as

well as the sorrows of life; it even ordains temperate good cheer as on occasion a duty. I should feel kindly to it if I were a Jew. If I were a Jew I should even hesitate to abandon my *Kosher* food, seeing that the sanitary laws of my people have kept it vital in every extreme of want. However, I can understand he may give all that up, both because it is inconvenient and for the better reason that, being a citizen of England, he wishes to live as an Englishman. But to let it be understood that he wishes his race to be forgotten—that indeed amazes me. And it takes such a wretched, material, middle-class sort of prosperity to promote this apostasy. The Spanish Jews, who were real aristocrats, owning broad lands and holding high offices, gloried in their race, and when the Inquisition forced some of them—many preferred to be burnt—to profess Christianity they remained secret Jews, and again in many cases after generations proclaimed their Judaism when they could. It is said, I hope truly, that Benjamin Disraeli was of such a family. He, to be sure, though the observance of Protestantism was part of the game he played, was far from being ashamed of his race. But now an ordinary stock-

broking English Jew, with no Inquisition and nothing worth calling public opinion against him, will change his name and wish to be taken for an Englishman.

It is amazing. When I see Isaac Solomon under his real name I know that whatever be his humble calling, and whatever the nature of his manners and customs, this man's ancestors had a civilisation and a great literature when mine were savages. But if he calls himself MacIntosh or something of that sort, I observe his features and recognise him for a humbug, and a very poor one too. I know his excuse. It is given by a young man in Mr. Zangwill's *Grandchildren of the Ghetto*. He was an artistic and clever young man, and he said that if he called himself Abrahams, his right name, he would be a living lie, because the public's idea of Abrahams was Fagin or Shylock. So he called himself Graham. (He was not so clever as Braham the singer, who by dropping merely the first 'a' of his father's name had an old-English-sounding name at once.) But the wretched creature should have reflected that art is a glory of his race, and most Jews in one way or another lovers of it, and carried his right flag gaily.

It is an old saying that every country has the Jews it deserves. In Russia the Jews would absorb the wealth of the country if they were not persecuted, whereas in Hungary they strike a fair bargain with the Hungarians. In France and even in Germany their share of wealth is just excessive enough to make them hated. But few Englishmen outside the Stock Exchange are inconvenienced by Jews, and as a nation we see their enjoyment of equal rights with neither envy nor alarm. Then why should any English Jew be ashamed of his birth? Professed and recognised Jews are to be found in both our Houses of Parliament, and eminent in our Law Courts. Their native love of the theatre is invaluable to our stage, in front of it and on it. They are not yet on the whole such good citizens as we hope they will be, since there is too much of them money-lending and financing, too little manufacturing, doctoring, soldiering, policing, but we understand the historical reason, and hope confidently for an improvement. But why should any of them wish to be—superficially even—merged in the English middle-classes? They are Orientals; the figures of the men and the beauty of the women pro-

claim it. And they do not wish to be really mixed with the West. They may change their names, but they still marry one another. The instinct of race is stronger than the conscious loyalty of race.

Long may it remain so. I would not have this Eastern colouring element merged away, nor is it likely to be. But when a Jew gives up all his customs, changes his name and goes to Christian churches, though his race be indestructible in him, he has consciously given up the fight, and struck the flag his forefathers carried through persecution and disdain, selling matches by day and studying the Rabbis at night, elbowed and mocked by Christian rowdies, in imagination sitting with Abraham their father and Moses their teacher on thrones in Heaven. And their grandchildren are ashamed of them! It is a pitiful present to follow a noble past, and it amazes me—a Gentile—beyond words to express my feeling. Has the spirit that mediæval kings could not break succumbed to the modern snob? What dirge will the daughters of Israel sing to lament *this* captivity?

## THE PERSISTENCE OF YOUTH

IN all ages and in all languages the praises of youth have been joyously or pathetically sounded. From time immemorial men have been exhorted to make the most of their youth, remembering that it would quickly pass away, and the catalogue of the ills which old age brings with it has been drawn out with dismal iteration. In a sort of half-hearted way men learned the lesson. They enjoyed themselves as much as possible when they were young, and when they were old made things as unpleasant as they could for their juniors, to revenge their own shortcomings in the joy of youth, and spent the rest of their time grumbling to one another. But it has been reserved for our practical age and for us practical Anglo-Saxons to learn the lesson in its fulness, and to draw the proper conclusion. We have determined to remain young until we die, and already the success we have achieved is remarkable. We made up our minds twenty years ago at most,

and already the percentage of young men who have defied all the prosaic limitations of their ancestors is amazing. By young men I mean, of course, men who are visibly and characteristically young, who by the mere tale of years may be anything up to sixty. For some time I have diligently read the lists of new books, and looked through tables of contents in the sterner reviews, in the hope that some philosopher might be found explaining the extraordinary duration of youth in the present day. I have been disappointed in my search, and am driven to make a few poor suggestions of my own, somewhat as a man wishing to study law takes a pupil instead of a tutor: by dint of writing about the matter I may haply light upon some cause or causes other than the determination which I have mentioned and which is not sufficient in itself, since in other ages men have tried to remain young and have somehow or other failed.

But let us first review the facts. I propose to confine myself to men, because in regard to women the change has been already noted and much exaggerated, and in their case it is confused with literary and other conventions and fashions. Moreover, that branch of the

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subject has the danger that one's philosophical intention might be confused with a spirit of uncouth and vulgar sarcasm, which is far from one. We will keep to men. Now, in the early part of last century a man was a man at twenty or so, a middle-aged man at thirty, and old at fifty. At the present time he is a boy up to about thirty-five, a young man up to fifty, and he is hardly regarded as old until he has exceeded David's maximum of life by six or seven years.

For the first half of my statement I refer my readers to the literature of the period *passim*.

‘Ladies even of the most uneasy virtue  
Prefer a spouse whose age is short of thirty,’

says Byron. Is anybody now regarded as a confirmed bachelor on account of his age? Not, I am certain, under seventy. But one might quote for ever. Even in the middle of the century Thackeray made elaborate fun of his Paul de Florac for posing as a young man at forty. I am acquainted with a young fellow whose friends and relations are making serious efforts to wean him from dissipation and bad companions and settle him in some regular business, and he is fifty-four.



As to the second part of the statement, my readers can supply their own instances by the thousand from their observation, the newspapers, and the conversation of their friends—instances of a youthful persistence which would have amazed our grandfathers. In the year 1900, when the Ministry was being re-formed, the newspapers were all commenting on the extraordinary youthfulness of Mr. Wyndham and Lord Selborne. It was thought really audacious of Lord Salisbury to give high office to these lads. They are both about forty, and Pitt and Fox were in the blaze of their reputation and influence fifteen years earlier in their lives. It is, of course, a commonplace that we are served by older politicians than was the case in past times, but the interesting thing is that the comments on Lord Selborne and Mr. Wyndham referred to their absolute, not their comparative youth, rejoiced in the vigour and capacity for receiving new ideas which their youth implied, and were inclined to be nervous about the want of caution to which it might expose them. The same thing happened in Lord Randolph Churchill's case. I well remember hearing, when he resigned the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, people

complain of his boyish petulance. I well remember it, because I was in my teens myself, and was rather disturbed by the length of time which had to elapse before I should be grown up. Lord Randolph was about forty at that time.

These instances, however, though they are properly germane to the subject, may be suspect because of the convention of politics, as of the bar, which speaks of men as young when all that is meant is that they are comparatively young at their trade. Let us take, therefore, a calling which notoriously can be and is pursued by anybody over seventeen. There is a 'dramatic critic' who is about forty-five years old and has been a dramatic critic for about twenty years, I believe. Until a very few years ago he was always referred to as a 'young gentleman.' That reminds me of Mr. Max Beerbohm (if he will not object to my mentioning it), who is thirty or so, and who is generally described as a 'youth.' If an author of twenty were to burst upon the world (such things have been), the critics would hardly admit that he was born.

These instances show the public tendency. They are, perhaps, partly explained by public

intelligence. It takes the average person about three years to grasp a simple change in facts, if it is mentioned to him at least twice a week. Years and years ago I was a dramatic critic for a few months, and I have still numerous acquaintances who have consulted me regularly ever since on the merits of every new play, though on every such occasion I have mentioned that I seldom go to the theatre. Suppose, then, when Mr. Wyndham was twenty-one, the average man was informed that he was a year older than when he was twenty. The average man could not grasp that fact until Mr. Wyndham was twenty-four. Accordingly, when Mr. Wyndham was forty the average man would have only advanced to the fact that he was twenty-six. Some such explanation may be brought against me when I advance my own theory that these men are called boys and youths and young gentlemen because they really are so.

I will therefore abandon these public instances and refer my readers to the host of men with whom they and I are personally acquainted, who are over forty and who are, veritably and actually, still very young men in appearance, in habits, and in conversation.

You must know them. Let me describe one. He has a slight, youthful figure, dressed in the latest mode. His face is smooth and bland, adorned with an adolescent moustache. He has neat, smooth hair, growing quite low on his forehead, and showing a little tendency to baldness as when he was sixteen. He has bright, amiable, and absolutely expressionless eyes. His habits are as simple as his face. He rises at a reasonably early hour, and after a good breakfast reads all about cricket or football, as the case may be, in the paper. He reads rather slowly, and this occupation, together with answering a few invitations to play games—he writes more slowly than he reads—takes up his time till lunch. After lunch he plays an athletic game. In the evening he may possibly go to a play, avoiding those which are suspected of having anything clever in them, or he may dance, or play a mild game of cards. If he has no such amusement, he is quite willing to talk from dinner to bed-time about the game he has played in the afternoon. This is his life in London: healthy and English. In the country there are more games and less newspapers. He never talks or listens to others talking about politics, or literature, or any-

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thing of that kind, not so much because it bores him as because he does not understand a word of it. I doubt if he was really aware until lately that anybody really cared for anything except games. The war forced him to recognise that other transactions take place in life, but I think he will soon forget it. For the moment he has slightly modified his habit of estimating all men according to their proficiency in some game or sport, but the habit will reassert itself before long. Even now he never mentions General Baden-Powell without adding that he kept goal at Charterhouse.

Such is an acquaintance of mine. Such he has been and looked for twenty years, and such he will be and look for twenty years more. On his own subject he is full of impetuosity. I have known him return to the house after a long day's fishing and say as he entered the room, 'Papers come? What's the cricket? For Heaven's sake tell me the cricket!' He has a son at the University, and I often think what an ideal parent he must have seemed to his son's schoolmasters. No nonsense about intellect, or education, or that sort of thing. If his son learned to play football skilfully the

school was the best of all schools in this best of all educated countries.

If all young men of forty were like this one the explanation would be easy. Devotion to athletic games would account for it all. But I know vicious young men of forty— young men who smoke too many cigars and sit up late and play cards for high stakes, like M. le Vicomte de Florac. Thackeray was, of course, mistaken in supposing that these practices were ever peculiar to youth. It is a lamentable fact that no age or country has universally accepted our own ideal of regular work and economical habits as the perfection of human life. But what is significant in the young men to whom I refer is that they do these things with the high spirits of youthful enjoyment, and in spite of their vices continue to look young. Dissipation in middle life used to become a habit, a necessity—not a joyous affair at all. And the middle-aged dissipators used generally to have, or affect, some more serious interest. Cæsar, for example, happened to rule the world and change its constitution. Charles Fox was a serious statesman with ideas in which he believed. Even 'Old Q.' had his side and interest in politics. Moreover, Cæsar

was bald and Charles Fox was fat. But these slim, smooth-faced, bright-eyed young debauchees of forty, who neither have nor pretend to have any interest in life but their dissipation, how do they do it? I remember hearing a woman refer to one of them as 'a nice boy.' I doubted his niceness and his boyhood, but she was right in her sense. There was nothing really wicked in his dissipation: it was the exuberance of a boy; and from a civilised point of view he had no claim, except the physical, to be thought a man.

These by no means exhaust the types of young men of forty; and if one passes from extreme cases to those in which boyishness is modified, a little and at times, by the rather serious pursuit of a profession or trade, one may include in the ranks of these young men the greater number of Englishmen belonging to the comfortable classes. How many are there, for example, who profess some sport or game as by far the chief interest of their lives—and I am loth to think them all hypocrites. If they are induced to talk on any other subject at all it will be in half-ideas, loosely expressed in comprehensive slang—just, in fact, as school-

boys talk. They have the intolerance of schoolboys for ideas not traditional and familiar to themselves, and the pride of schoolboys in their own ignorance. This may sound like harsh criticism, but I mean it for praise. Youth is everything. These young men of forty—nay, of fifty and sixty—are not naturally stupid, I am sure; but they feel instinctively that brains make a man grow old, and are determined to avoid them accordingly. One merely admires their astounding success. It is conceivable, indeed, that the national distrust and contempt of intellect may not be conducive to our continuance in high place in the competition of nations. But what a pity that is! If the world would only recognise that the accomplishment of perpetual youth is a far greater thing than the elaboration of intelligence, and, instead of taking advantage of our nobler work, seek with a whole heart to follow in our footsteps, how wise the world would be!

There is one consequence of this duration of youth over which one chuckles. The merely young in years, those who had the exclusive title of youth a few generations ago, no longer, so to speak, have the place



to themselves. The young man of twenty no longer triumphs in his young-manhood over his seniors. They are all young men too. Young men of forty bar his way and elbow him aside. It is very good for him. But this odd revenge of time tends to disappear, since at twenty a man nowadays is more and more a child. The extreme youth of undergraduates strikes every older person who revisits his University. It is quite common to meet young men, as they once were, of twenty, who tell you they intend to smoke when they are thirty. Such young men are of opinion that their enjoyments must be literally confined to athletic games for the next ten years or so, and have no desire to compete with the young men twenty years their seniors.

We grow up more slowly—there is no doubt of that. But that is a little off my subject, which is not the slow development of youth, but its persistence at the same point. How is it done? I have half suggested the neglect of the intellect and the studious cultivation of stupidity, which certainly becomes more and more the quality most sympathetic to the majority of our contemporaries. Almost anything will be forgiven

a man of whose stupidity our world is convinced, and our high places are always at his service. But it is possible that this may be a consequence and not a cause of our perpetual youth, or both may be consequences of a common cause. Perhaps we work less than our fathers; for it is one of the numerous facts with which nature mocks our ideals that hard work ages a man more quickly than most things. But then we are told that our fathers were more leisurely than we are. Or we drink less? True that we no longer sit over our wine like gentlemen, but prefer horrible mixtures at odd times, like bar loafers; but the doctors say that a bottle of sound wine after dinner did our fathers less harm than the casual 'drink' does ourselves. We play games more; but then our play is hard work. . . . In fine, I give the explanation up, and must be content merely to admire.

## FRANCIS GORDON

### A STUDY OF CHARACTER AND CIRCUMSTANCE

It annoys me that the world, which is often roughly right in its judgments of men it knows personally, should persist in misunderstanding one who is my old and valued friend, and what follows is partly an attempt to set him right with it. But I think also that the case is not without significance for our times; that there are many men of a temperament and an intelligence akin to those of Francis Gordon whose relation to the world is much the same as his: men whom other periods would have treated differently and yet for whom this period assuredly should find a use. I fancy it in the case of some other men of my acquaintance; I know it in his, for I am the oldest and, I believe, the most intimate of his familiars. I cannot say what this use may be; I am an observer, not a practical politician. You, perhaps, may be able to tell me.

The average fool holds that Francis Gordon is a sulky brute, and that he has no business to be so because his income is over ten thousand a year. His face and manner alike are grave; his courtesy is a little stilted and his joints seem slightly to creak when he unbends. Hardly anybody but myself calls him Frank. Wiser men say that he is a sentimentalist, though none of them, I am sure, ever heard him talk sentimentally, and add that plenty of hard work would make a different man of him. Women are apt to think him interesting when they first meet him, and cold or sarcastic when they know him better. One of them, a woman very zealous about charities and causes and things, told me she would like to shake him, and this although he had given her a considerable sum for one of her institutions. Another woman confided to me her opinion that his life was shadowed by some passion that went wrong, and that it was most unfair to his wife who was devoted to him.

All these opinions are wrong. Francis Gordon is not sulky, but is on the contrary anxious that his guests should enjoy themselves, though I admit he does not care much what they think of him. Work would not

have made him very different, though, as things have turned out, it might have made him a shade happier. But he was quite honest in thinking that since it was unnecessary for him to work for a living he might do more good in his generation by independent effort than by increasing its competition; he had and has plenty of energy and far more than the average brains. As for women, I am quite certain that no 'unhappy passion' business has bothered him at all, and if it had I am even more certain that he would soon have got over it. He is one of those men—far more numerous than women novelists imagine—in whose lives women are more of an accident than an influence. If they marry it is from the ordinary attraction of healthy manhood, evanescent in itself and succeeded by a relation of pleasant friendliness, given good luck. If they do not marry, they think little of women, in a personally sexual way, when they are past thirty. In the sum there is far more emotional interest for them in their friendships, many or rare, with men they know well and who meet them on their own plane of intellect. Frank Gordon is one of them. His wife is not 'devoted' to him, but they are excellent

friends. They both recognise human duties, and their child—they have a daughter five years old—would be a restraining hand if they needed one. They do not, and as far as their mutual relation is concerned their lives are smooth and eventless. I have been a little particular in this matter, because a fiction-fatted public is slow to remember, in spite of its personal experience, that there are men in whose lives women (unless they happen to marry an abnormally vicious one) count for little.

Then why is Frank Gordon's face so sad in repose? why are his eyes sometimes so wistful? Why, in spite of his honest efforts to look interested, do people hate him for looking bored? Why is he so restless, pacing the smoking-room after a long day's sport, and going for aimless journeys? He has fair health, a quick and sound intelligence, many minor interests, at least, in books and art, an untroubled home and a good income. Why is he essentially a discontented man? It needs but few words to tell you. Francis Gordon is an enthusiast without an enthusiasm, a born reformer with nothing to reform. Time and again his nature has struggled into an outlet, and time and again his intelligence

has pushed it back. I fancy an outline of his history so far—he is thirty-five or thereabouts—contains a slight remark, a whisper or so, for his age and country.

He is not so Scotch as his name, for his great-grandfather, who married an English heiress, settled on her lands in Kent, and there this offshoot of the Gordons has remained ever since. We are all rather mixed in race, and Frank's mixture is of the usual English proportion; there is the original Highland stock, a Lowland Scotch grandfather on his mother's side; Kentish squires, a remote drop of Irish, a dash of successful commerce. The preponderating element—these questions interest me—has been the landholding, essentially though not technically aristocratic class. The physical result in Frank is a tall, rather lanky, raw-boned, sanguine, blond creature, with a broad forehead and big dark-blue eyes. It is the conquering type, as the ethnologists say, the type that pushes and succeeds and sways, actively intelligent and organising, not as a rule reflectively poetical, or subtle.

The first typical recollection I have of him is one which I hope will not offend anybody; I give it simply as an indication of character;

the theology of a boy of sixteen need hardly be taken to heart. It was at school. We had been confirmed at the same time, and were walking from the chapel together after our first communion. Suddenly Frank stopped, laid a hand on my arm and looked hard at me. Then, 'There's nothing in it, old man,' said he, 'nothing whatever.' I was more surprised than shocked, I confess, for I had taken my confirmation rather calmly, in a spirit of routine. But Gordon had been extraordinarily zealous and attentive to our instructions, had studied the books he was told to read with immense care, and had avoided light reading or conversation all the time. I was not shocked, but I thought his remark rather bad form under the circumstances and told him so. He looked at me contemptuously and was silent for a while. Then he said: 'I've been thinking it all out, and it won't do. I can't believe in any of it.' 'You don't believe in Christianity?' I asked sarcastically. It seemed absurd then that anybody should not believe in Christianity. 'No, I don't,' he said stoutly. 'It's just like any other superstition.' He walked me round and round the cloisters, arguing and explaining. So far as I can remember he had



arrived independently—more or less—at the common objections, the difficulty of reconciling the omnipotence of Providence with its benevolence, inconsistencies of accounts, the facts of science, the kind of evidence for the orthodox view, and so on. It would be stupid and shallow to dismiss the youth Gordon as a prig. His emotions had been genuinely stirred on behalf of the mystery he had been lately taught, and it was with painfulness and reluctance that he came to disbelieve. You must remember that young people, when they have the premisses, are far more relentless logicians than their elders. I suppose he had heard sceptical talk at home and something had brought it back to him, and his interest being now alive, the argument was pursued with vehemence. He had gone through in his boyhood the kind of struggle which many men went through fifty years ago, which few men go through now. He told me that it was just after the communion that he had felt convinced he could never believe in it all again. After this he read a good deal on the subject, but cared little to talk about it; he ceased rapidly to trouble himself, having once made up his mind.

This incident may seem absurd to my

readers, because we are accustomed to our boys' and young men having the minds of babies, and the race seems to be losing its interest in all abstract questions. But every now and then you find a boy, who is not a prig, reproducing the more active intelligence of our ancestors at the same age. Gordon, so far as I can remember our school days, never wanted to air his ideas, nor was he ever remarkably reflective; he simply had an inquiring mind and acquiesced in its conclusions.

This was his first disappointment, and it is interesting to me because it shows a sort, a type of intelligence which prevents its possessor from entering upon the recognised modes of spiritual endeavour. But for that, Francis Gordon might easily have become a parson zealous among the poor, or might have enlisted himself among the active spirits of the Roman Church.

At the university he paid the customary toll to athletics, but was unable to regard them as the *summum bonum*. He spoke a few times at the Union but soon gave it up. 'It's all humbug,' he said, 'it's all playing at being politicians. No one's really keen about a question; no one really cares what happens in the country; it's all swagger and posing.'

His reading used to amuse me. He would start on a philosopher, and peg away at his theories, until he convinced himself that they had no practical bearing on the world—a conviction he invariably came to—when he would decline the philosopher's future acquaintance altogether. As for ancient history, he was interested in learning which state beat which and how and why, or in following the development of policies, but names and dates he simply waved on one side. Naturally he took no distinction in the schools. In our time there was no particular 'movement' going on, religious or æsthetic. The place had settled down into a playground, in which condition I believe it remains. Nor would Gordon have been an easy disciple for either. What he wanted was a good tangible fighting cause and a big field for it. He disbelieved in the influence of the university, and was eager to be done with it. 'And what are you going to do?' his tutor asked him in his last term. 'The bar? Politics?' 'Politics, I think,' said Gordon. 'You see, if one hasn't got to work it's a chance for backing up one's side.' 'And what is your side?' 'I don't know yet. I shall see.' His tutor smiled, and probably thought Gordon was a trifler.

The fact is that he was far too much in earnest to label himself. 'You see,' he said to me, 'The Conservative party's a collection of vested interests, mostly bad. The only good vested interest, the interest which did something for the country in keeping up its manhood, has been hopelessly betrayed. The landed interest, of course, yes: you think because I'm going to be a squire: never mind. Well, then, the Liberals are simply grinding away at meaningless catchwords: *they're* no good. I wish to heaven I believed in Home Rule for Ireland'—it was in 1890—'there would be something tangible to fight for. But I don't, and there's no need of anybody to fight against it. What we want, my dear chap, is to knock this beastly plutocracy on the head; to kill this infernal reverence for money; to put people in their right places and give the country a decent ambition.'

'Well, knock it on the head,' said I.

'But don't you see,' he replied, without noticing my irony, 'if we did that we should probably destroy British commerce at the same time, and where would the country be then?'

He did not stand for Parliament, but

on leaving Oxford was extremely busy in London and in other large towns investigating the condition of the people. I saw him at intervals at this time and he used to distress me with horrible accounts of overwork and destitution. He never raved; I should give a very wrong idea of Frank Gordon if I implied that he was a foolish sentimentalist, running hither and thither. He was quietly, and so to speak, glowingly determined to find some way of succour. He failed, of course. He gave away nearly all his large allowance, but 'what,' as he asked, 'is the good of pouring a quart bottle of oil into the sea?' He formed a great alliance with a very militant working men's M.P., and he was interested in Trades Unions. He was soon disillusioned.

'Their methods are rotten,' he said. 'They can't protect the weak without spoiling the strong—the good strong, I mean. They won't let a workman get above the average; they put a premium on incapacity. If this goes on America will cut us out all over the shop.'

He joined the Fabian Society, remained in it a year, and left it because (as he said) it

was all theorising. 'There's nothing to get your teeth into,' said he.

After that he got on to the London School Board, and enjoyed fighting what he thought was class selfishness. But he ended by disapproving of the ideas and methods of his friends. He inclined to the opinion expressed in after years by Sir John Gorst that they cared for their own importance more than for education. They would not listen to his view of what popular education should be, and he left the School Board in disgust.

About this time—in 1895 I think—his father died, and Gordon had £12,000 a year to give to a cause if he liked. But in the interval he had married—talking politics hard all the time—and was about to become a father. He showed (I think) good sense in this connection. 'My wife didn't marry me for my money, but still the money, the place, and all that, was an implied part of the contract. It wouldn't be fair to give it away. Besides, show me the cause that deserves it.' I did not show him such a cause: there are not too many charming places in the country where one can go when one likes. Frank, however, does give largely to

hospitals and other charities. Under protest, however; he says it is a crying scandal that they are not run by the State; he believes his gifts to be immoral and has an uneasy conscience about them. When the Græco-Turkish war broke out I wondered if Gordon would take a turn with the Greeks. When I spoke of it he fetched a copy of the *Times* which contained an account of the increasing poverty and hardships of the Italians. 'There,' said he, 'is the result of fighting for distressed nationalities. It's all true; I've seen it for myself. I'm glad the old man never realised it.' I remembered then that his father had lost an arm and spent a large part of his fortune in the cause of Italian Independence. Frank broke out fiercely. 'Yes! That's the end of it. To enrich a horde of cursed bourgeois place-hunters and swindlers. That's what it always comes to. Look at France. Liberty! By Jove, how I envy those other chaps, Byron and all that. They believed in liberty—thought it worth fighting for—had no misgivings. What can we fight for?'

I was less surprised than his other friends when Frank Gordon joined the Imperial Yeomanry. He went out to South Africa

at a time when events looked black for England, and that motive was, I am sure, more than a quest of excitement or than discontent with him. I looked to find him changed on his return a few months ago. But he was just the same.

‘I was keen enough at first,’ he said. ‘Oh, yes, I *do* know what fear means. But I was keen enough not to care, and one gets used to the chance of being hit all right. But—don’t repeat this—I don’t mind admitting to you that after we’d got to Pretoria, and it was certain that it was only a question of time for us to settle things—after that I hated it. It seemed as though it wasn’t my business quite so much as before, somehow, and I just the least bit grudged the chance of being maimed for life—the killing didn’t so much matter. And then I hate the whole business. Not our fault? No; not in one sense. But it *is* our fault that we didn’t stop the Boers arming years ago. Public opinion wasn’t ready, of course; there’s never a government that will do its duty if it’s not sure of being backed up. It’s damnable. And then the Boers—poor devils! They’re simply the victims of the Kruger gang and our infernal apathy. Of course,



one gets to understand and like our own chaps, and all that. We had to go on, of course. But I lost my enthusiasm.'

So Francis Gordon is home again. It is not much in my way to commiserate the troubles of the well-to-do; as a general rule I wish they had more of them. But Francis Gordon's case I do think a pity. He has parts and energy; he would not shirk work; he is disinterested and honestly wishes to do something for a generation he holds to be in a bad way. He is, to be sure, constitutionally incapable of going on with details when he sees nothing more than details ahead. He must have a recognisable, large object for which to work. But that given, he would work hard as a subordinate, though I firmly believe him to be a born leader. He showed that in South Africa, so far as opportunity went; his men (he held a commission) were not only devoted to him, but a conspicuously effective unit. He is the organiser of all kinds of useful things in his district of Kent. But there is no large recognisable object for his work. He refuses to go into Parliament: he sees nothing there but personal competition of a rather dingy order, an ignoble compromise,

an insistent zeal to do the least possible. He deploras the materialism of his fellow-countrymen, but he has nothing better to offer them. He detests the modern conditions of labour, but he sees no way of effectually improving them, which would not further handicap the country in the competition of the nations. He still rails at the plutocracy, but he sees no way of dispensing with it. For books and all kinds of art he has the normal Englishman's view that they are a bye-work, an amusement, though he has not the normal Englishman's unspoken contempt for them. He is fond of books and pictures and music, but they could never supply an object for his unemployed enthusiasm. He is an engine rusting off the rails.

I can think of no duty incident to his position which he does not perform. He looks after his tenants as well as in these independent days he is allowed. He does what he can to promote the prosperity and social pleasures of his part of the world. (He has even called on a plutocrat Jew who has bought a neighbouring place that he may keep the Jew up to the mark as a landlord.) He is hospitable, and does his

best for a succession of guests who generally complain of his aloofness afterwards. All this would occupy the whole time of many men, but Frank does it with his left hand. His right hangs by his side. The times are out of joint for him, but unlike Hamlet he would be only too delighted to set them right, or do his share of it, if he were shown the way. He has the qualities, is of the type of Englishmen who succeed in life, but that he has no selfish ambition, and will not work for personal success alone, and he has found no cause which he has not found out. As we count years nowadays, he is only just middle-aged. Still, if the world is to find a use for him, it must find one soon. It seems a pity to waste him altogether. •

## AT THE OPERA

It is a large place, and it is full of significance. A Londoner, but more especially a poor Londoner, cannot take it lightly. One—a poor Londoner to wit—can go to it but seldom; and then, it is probable, as for the moment a parasite. I regard it as I regard yachts and country houses and other things beyond the scale of my humble life to procure at will—things for which I must be dependent on the benevolence of richer people. At the Opera, as at the rich man's table, the anarchical feelings I nurse in my attic give way to a proper meek subservience. That, at least, is my first condition as I take my seat; I confess that my awe is lightened as I look about me, and it is lightened chiefly by the diamonds.

I congratulate myself that I have at least one advantage over a large number of my more comfortable fellow-creatures, in that I have some idea of the proper and improper application of jewels. Love of jewels may

be barbarous, but it is not vulgar. The wearing of jewels may be vulgar, and I regret to think that it generally is so. For exuberant joy in the possession of them blinds the majority of women to the fact that profuse adornment by them beseems but a small minority. A certain sort of distinguished beauty and a certain sort of distinguished ugliness gain an increase of distinction by them. But merely pretty, merely commonplace, merely unattractive women are made ridiculous. It is a niggardly dispensation of nature, no doubt; but it should be accepted. One woman has a bosom of snow, and one is as brown as a berry; one has a pair of blue eyes, and one is a nymph with but one, sir. It is all a lottery. But even so Madame Calvé might blaze in jewels from head to foot, and she and they be the more beautiful, while that little average simpering woman in the stalls merely has her natural commonplaceness thrown into relief by her big pearls and her tiara—commonplaceness, be it noted, which, properly attired, would be a right background, a thing respectable and amiable enough. However, there is comfort in all this for the poor Londoner who credits himself with taste.

A box at the Opera is a symbol of the strength there is in riches; inappropriate pearls and diamonds are symbols of its weakness.

But there is a finer significance in the Opera than this of riches and good or bad taste. The Opera is a fixed point and a point of social departure, a symbol of coherence in our hierarchy and of our unity with many generations. The literature of social London takes it as an institution. People wrote papers about it in the old *Spectator*. In Thackeray, the master of ceremonies to the middle of the nineteenth century, allusions to it are innumerable. Jack Belsize was arrested as he left it; Arthur Pendennis was going to it when he met George Warrington. Mr. Meredith has not omitted it; you remember the scene there after the Derby in *Rhoda Fleming*, when Algernon the Fool bustled about in the lobby. One thinks of all that as one looks round the house and walks about between the acts; one treads on traditional ground, and one is materially linked with the past and the future. From the bottom of my heart I pity the poor musical critics who go to it as to a place of business, and take its significance as a matter of course.

That is a general impression. The last time, however, that I went to the Opera all these reflections were swallowed up in a glowing enthusiasm. When the curtain was up my eyes and ears were wholly and with intensity for the stage; when it was down I could only stammer praises. It was a joy in art, than which I have hardly known a greater. It was Calvé in *Carmen*. All things are accidents, just as nothing is an accident. As in the matter of jewels, so one woman is born with brains and heart and imagination, and another an idiot; one has a beautiful voice, another a penny whistle. It may be illogical, therefore, to make a hierarchy of qualities. But I confess that when a great singer has a fine voice, a sound training, and a skilful use of it, and no more, I rather grudge her her divinity and the homage the world pays her. I keep my own homage for other qualities, gifts too, but gifts to my mind nobler—the brain and instinct and emotion and imagination which make a great actress.

Calvé is a great singer and a great actress as well. It was not a question of amusement, interest, entertainment. It was the perfect embodiment and expression of a

permanent and universal human type. The part is a lucky one for her, of course. Her physical genius, as it were, her bountiful and vigorous beauty, goes a long way. A far inferior actress who had Calvé's physical gifts would be able pleasantly and in a way inevitably to express the good-humoured, life-loving, passionate wanton. But no physical disadvantage could have spoiled this acting. Her gay assurance of life and love, her humorous coquetry in the first two acts, her weariness and depression in the third, her terror in the last—all were complete and enthralling. Calvé may or not be able to play a subtler part as finely. In this simple and elemental one she was perfect. Opera is in its nature an absurdity, more or less; its mode must be a hindrance to realism in emotion. The opera of *Carmen* is pretty and clever enough, but has moments of fatuity, and would not of itself stir one inevitably: Calvé triumphed over everything, made one forget everything in mere enjoyment of a fact in nature and art. Such an achievement is one which deserves all the homage that can be paid it. We talk glibly about art, but even those of us who can feel it fritter away our power to feel it over mediocre and



commonplace examples. Calvé's achievement takes one out of this slough to the high land of absolute truth; in vision and imagination one is stronger and better for it. If I were a poet or a painter I would give the best of my own art to celebrate it. As it is, I can only say in a plain pedestrian fashion that I am grateful for a sensation of absolute joy.

## A CONVERSATION

I WAS taking a long walk in the country, and stopped for my lunch at an inn I had known some years before, but had not visited since. A shower of rain came on while I was eating, and having finished my meal I repaired to the little smoking-room to await the sun. I smoked my pipe and looked into the yard, and reflected, in a sufficiently prosaic vein, that the inn had changed far less than I. Then to me there entered a young man, who also smoked and looked at the yard, when he and I had agreed about the weather. One often thinks that one has met a stranger before, somewhere and some time or other, but in this case my impression was both more intimate than that and vaguer. The young man seemed to correspond to a dream, but a dream that had lasted a long time or had many times recurred. I was certain that something about him was familiar to me, but seeking in vain to determine the matter concluded that it was

nothing more than his clothes. I had raked out an old knickerbocker suit for my walk, and he seemed to a short vision to be wearing one of the same material. But beyond this he affected me as a casual stranger can do but seldom. I was interested in the young man. Something about him won my sympathy, and then something irritated and repelled me. It was such a discord of feeling as happens when a man whose vices we dislike charms us with his manners. But this young man had not spoken three sentences to me, and I have no instinct for detecting the secret vices of strangers. The rain continued, and to rid myself of unprofitable speculations, I resumed the conversation. Soon the young man was talking about himself with an ingenuousness and freedom I am un-English enough to like, though the habit of the world has taught me it is unwise to indulge in them. To some extent I responded to the compliment, to keep the conversation, which rather interested me, on the same plane.

He had lately, it seemed, left Oxford, and the place had disappointed him. His impression of it, he said, was too much encumbered with dinners, and cards, and racing, and

tobacconists' shops, to say nothing of the incessant pursuit, or, at least, talk of athletic games and exercises, and was too little consonant to the atmosphere of scholars and recluses and quiet eccentrics of which he had read in books. I assured him that if he were to return to Oxford in a few years for a day or so the atmosphere he wanted would surround him. No longer distracted by the appeals to a newly emancipated blood he would feel the tradition of ancient halls and chapels, and taste the remoteness and exclusive silence of Fellows' gardens. 'But then,' said he, 'it will be too late.' I explained to his ignorance that the perception of all pleasures, save those few which Nature teaches us to take betimes—of all pleasures that come of man's artifice or finer senses in ourselves—is joined to a regret that we did not perceive them sooner. I was pleased that I could oppose to his quick glance of distress a face of good-humoured resignation.

Then I asked him if he was going to do any work, or was lucky enough to idle in comfort. Did I think it lucky? 'Yes,' said I; 'work is the primal curse, and the proverbs in praise of it were made by masters for slaves, or by slaves to cheat their slavery.'

Or they are repeated by the cowardly fortunate to propitiate Nemesis. Work not at all, or, if you must work, work as little as possible. Above all, don't, please, work hard three-quarters of your life to enjoy the remaining fourth at leisure. You will have lost the power of enjoyment, or you will die before the time comes; in either case you will look a fool to the laughing gods.' He looked surprised, as though the precepts of his elders had been ordinarily different, and I, remembering how little original was my teaching, was pleased again.

I knew, before he told me, that he intended to write things, and when I told him that that might be no work at all—an art or an amusement—or might be work for bread, in which case it was damnable, he replied that with him it would be art and bread too. 'But,' said he, 'you will advise me against it, like everybody else.' 'Why, no,' said I, and stepped on to the bench, 'not of necessity. Can you live on a hundred and fifty pounds a year? For if you write in the way of art, if you write only on themes which interest you, and on which you have something to say, if your original work is an observation of what (as things go) is fresh,

or a fresh observation of the old, even if you can create what has not been created before—a hundred and fifty pounds a year will, with luck, be your commercial reward. I assume in you taste, intelligence, and so forth, things which in this way of writing are important. In other sorts of writing, self-advertisement, toadying, and the frequenting of certain sets of people—probably not an amusing way of spending your time—are more important, but you speak of writing as an art. There is, of course, a thousand-to-one chance that your productions, made for their own sakes, may yet appeal to certain numbers of your fellow-citizens, but even then you must have the additional chance in your favour of a publisher both honest and competent. Can you live on a hundred and fifty pounds a year?’

The young man believed it to be impossible. I remained on the bench. ‘By no means,’ said I. ‘In London, I grant you, the tastes you probably have, the example of your companions, the mode of life of people who amuse you, will make it very difficult. But you may take a labourer’s cottage in the country, have sufficient beef and mutton, and shoe-leather for your long walks, and

subscribe to the London Library—all for a hundred and fifty pounds a year.’ He said it would be dull.

I fixed my judicial eye on him and dared him to affirm that London theatres, restaurants, and so forth, were not dull. He did not dare, but fell back on the difference in people: those who always lived in the country were not intelligent enough for him.

‘And do you really think,’ I asked him, ‘that the difference in intelligence which is made by travelling in the twopenny-tube, going to the music-hall and the Academy and reading the evening papers, is a difference to be considered?’

This question rather posed him, but he rallied. ‘I don’t mean,’ said he, ‘ordinary respectable, or even distinguished people. I mean the people you can meet in London who live free, rational lives, who don’t care about conventions, and say what they really think, and are good fun generally.’

I sighed. ‘My dear young man,’ said I, ‘it is cruel to destroy your illusions, and I know very well that this one—that disreputable people are more amusing than respectable people—is one that dies hardest of all. Nevertheless, it will die like the others. Dis-

reputable people are just as great bores in the long-run as respectable people, I assure you. In fact, they are worse, if you have a sense of humour. The humorous heretic gets more fun out of the orthodox than out of the seriously heretical. Time will kill this illusion of yours also. I am sorry for you.'

The conversation seemed a little to depress the young man, and to re-establish his confidence in life, I remarked that after all he, in his comparative youth, had many advantages. He answered politely, but I entreated him to be frank. 'I have implied,' said I, 'that my view of people and places is more equable than yours. There is no discourtesy, then, if you correct the balance of advantages.'

'Why, then,' said he, 'there is something to be said for me. What you call equanimity I call weariness. You have lost your zest for London and your zest for society, even disreputable society. I am still immensely interested in both. There are people who fascinate me irresistibly, and those who move my curiosity and zeal for knowledge till I must satisfy them at any cost. There I have an advantage over you, I confess.'

'There are two sides of a medal,' I rejoined.



'No one has an infinite power of being interested. Six men and women, or so, appeal to you individually with the force you describe; six at a time is even a large number. No one, man or woman, interests me as much as all that. But I can be mildly entertained by thousands of strangers, and they need be neither clever nor fascinating. A talk with a farmer or a middle-aged country clergyman entertains me; you it would bore, unless he discovered some eccentricity of habit or opinion. Children, again; have you time to watch them?'

'Oh, yes,' he said. 'I am fond of children——'

'Of some; exactly. But I love them all. I can watch with real pleasure and sympathy a child toddling down a village street, or nursing her dolls——'

'You must be older than you look,' quoth he, but I disregarded the interruption. 'While with you, unless you observe some precocity or some dreadful symptom of hereditary influences——'

'Not quite such a prig, I think,' he said. 'But if you stop short at watching children, or mildly conversing with commonplace people, you miss the possibilities of human

beings, the romance any one of them may disclose to you. I suppose,' he added suddenly and with a blush, as I thought I saw, 'you are not and will never again be passionately in love?'

I smiled. 'One never knows,' I said; 'it is certainly a long time since it happened to me. But is the sensation so completely delightful?'

'It can be infernally painful,' he admitted. 'But it gives a meaning and reality to life that nothing else can.'

'Perhaps,' I said; 'let us by all means make the best of it. For me, I am in this matter something of a philosopher. I believe its analysis to be simple, and your poetry and my earthiness to have each its drawbacks and compensations. But the rain would be over before I could explain myself, and after all my philosophy would cut a poor figure by the side of your rhapsodies and beautiful quotations.'

'I too,' said he, 'was a philosopher in my time.'

'And you have gone on to something better? It is a pity, my friend, that you could not begin with the romance and the poetry; but few of us have Richard Feverel's luck. But your boyish philosophy was cynical

and mine is human. . . . You are fresh from Oxford and the schools. You are all for ideas and theories in your thoughts and reading, and facts are tedious to you.'

'Surely,' he said, 'ideas, the best fruits of human intelligence and mental labour, are more worthy of study than the irrelevant accidents of human interaction?'

'The phrase is soothing, though barbarous: no doubt you used it in your papers. The misfortune is that you get to the end of the ideas in time and the facts are inexhaustible. You have been born into a generation (I regret to inform you after much patient observation of it) which is intellectually sapless, and unless a change come quickly is unlikely to increase the store of philosophical speculation. You will probably be thrown back on facts, and you will haply find that they grow on you. Memoirs and letters, all kinds of trivial habits and conversations and meetings will form the bulk of your reading. There is little poetry now, and our studies of character are elaborately superficial, and our romances do not even conceal the wires behind the puppets. You will be thrown back on memoirs and diaries and letters.

‘I wonder,’ said he, ‘if your own intellect—’ he stopped and seemed to lack words for his idea. Seeing him embarrassed, I went on talking.

‘You have decided to write for your bread. Has it never occurred to you that a profession—which writing is not—might bring you greater happiness? The bar, for example?’ He said that the details would bore him, and that he could not afford to wait till briefs came.

‘But it is the process, not the subject matter, which interests men in all such competition; the process and the personal results, and as for waiting, intelligence, which I do not doubt you believe yourself to possess, tells everywhere in the long-run. Certain very simple human qualities besides are necessary, but there is no grand mystery about success at the bar. But that is only one of the regular callings of your countrymen. Now, mark me, young man. You are taking up for a calling or a profession, that which is an art, an amusement, an accomplishment. Excellence in it is very far from meaning worldly success: why should it? In the regular callings, efficiency in them, the qualities suited to their practice, mean success

in the sense in which the world uses the term. In this pursuit of yours, worldly success comes either by a rare accident or by the debasement of the qualities which might make a proper excellence in it. Now you think you can despise worldly success—despise money and all it may imply. “Wait till you come to forty year!” If then you despise these things, yours is a rare spirit indeed: the chances are you will regret. You deliberately stand aside from the common competition of your fellow-men. Well, competition is an evil: the vaunted progress it brings us is but a feather to the weight of misery it inflicts on half of us, to the social dulness it inflicts on almost all. But you cannot stand aside from your fellows with impunity. There will come a time when you will regret the absence of things you now despise—established position, though it be established on vulgarity, the respect of your neighbours, though it be the respect of fools, even comforts and luxuries. Power: who knows that if you joined in the common competition you would not work your way to power? At least the chance would be a fair one: in your way it will be a million to one.’

'Power to influence fools?' he murmured.

'Power is power,' I rejoined. 'To influence your fellow-men, to order their doings, to shape their fortunes—that is the natural instinct of men of parts in your race. It is dormant in you now, because you are distracted by art and philosophy, and because in the conceit of knowledge, too rapidly and easily gained, you let folly obscure humanity. But you will find out humanity——'

'It was exposed long ago,' he rather rudely suggested.

'You will find out that you cannot ignore it; that to have given up all chance of influencing your fellow-creatures is bitter, or at least to have missed their respect is uncomfortable. Be warned in time.'

'Thank you,' said he, 'but I shall have a shot at my own game. As for power, if I were an Elizabethan nobleman I might aim at it, because I could enjoy life at the same time. You have contradicted yourself, you know. Work—your great evil—is an absolute necessity for success at the bar or in affairs generally. Now, the advantage of my writing business is that you cannot work conscientiously at it for more than an hour a day: if you do more you are ceasing to give

the world your best. That is a great satisfaction.'

He annoyed me, and I rose abruptly. 'Go your ways,' said I: 'go and live in London and hunt for romances and be interested in humbugs and run into debt and be worried out of your wits. But don't suppose you can keep up your idea of writing as an art. You will have to do something which will degrade it—you will write leading articles or dramatic criticism. And even then—but go your ways and God be with you.'

I walked to the fireplace and knocked out my pipe. Then I raised my eyes to the mirror above the mantel-piece. The young man had followed me and was looking over my shoulder. In a flash I knew him at last: I had seen that face in a glass many times.

'Yes,' he said, as I turned and faced him: 'it is so. I was you ten years ago.' We shook hands silently, and as men shake hands who have met to quarrel. I understood my instinctive antipathy: how often had I cursed his exaggerations and mistakes and folly and idleness! But he seemed to share the feeling, and was indeed the first to express it.

'You complacent beast!' he cried, 'You to



lecture me on not going to the bar and standing aside from my fellow-men and all that! As though I had no ambitions! Have you forgotten them? What have you done with them? Why, man, it is ten years—ten years!—and you have had time to create a new English drama and purify the public taste and reconstruct a Tory party and write a modern epic—you have had time for a whole Renaissance, by Jove! And what have you to show? You have acquired a capacity to live in a labourer's cottage and watch with pleasure a confounded child walking down the village street. That is all, positively all. You're a rare fellow!

'My dear fellow,' I rejoined mildly, 'I really do apologise, but the fact is I came to the conclusion that these ambitions of yours would involve a lot of infernally tedious details. Besides, it's not the time for a Renaissance. We may be going down hill, I grant you—in fact I think we have been doing so intellectually, as a people, since the time of Elizabeth—but we have not reached the bottom. We must wait till then, before we can climb another hill: there is no going up the same. Besides, I have written a few little books'—['Ugh,' said he]—'which—some



of them, in parts—I still think rather good, though no doubt they would not appeal to you. My taste is more catholic.’

‘It is,’ he answered grimly. ‘What do you mean by praising ——?’ (I suppress the name.)

‘Ah, I remember you had a great contempt for that gifted lady. I forget if you had read any of her works—I rather think not. Well, it interests me more to explain than to resent popular successes, and in doing so I often come upon qualities which I admire—as in the case you mention. You are really rather negative, you know.’

‘And you’re flabby.’

‘And you’re violent.’

‘And you’re tame.’

‘Your enthusiasms are absurd.’

‘Your apathy is disgusting.’

‘Why didn’t you adopt a decent trade?’

‘Why haven’t you written a great book?’

‘You think yourself a *roué*.’

‘You think yourself a countryman.’

‘You’re no judge of wine; I am.’

‘I can drink it with impunity; you can’t.’

Then we both felt the unreason of our dispute, and were silent. And then, somehow, I felt a strange pity for this young

man, so honest in his self-conceit, so ignorant of the forces against him. And he, it seemed, was sorry for me. Our hands met in a grasp of sympathy, and we turned to part.

‘But, by the way,’ I asked him; ‘which of us is real? Am I a dreadful warning, or are you a wistful memory?’

‘You are real,’ he said; ‘and are you glad?’

‘Upon my word I don’t know,’ I answered, as I awoke. But I would rather not dream that dream again. I have omitted the really interesting things we said to one another.









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